

Baudelaire

Le Spleen de Paris

(Petits Poèmes en prose, 1869)



'Spleen et Idéal' - Félix-Hilaire Buhot (French, 1847-1898)
National Gallery of Art

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Translator’s Introduction

Baudelaire’s *Le Spleen de Paris*, also known as *Paris Spleen* or *Petits Poèmes en prose*, is a collection of fifty short pieces published posthumously in 1869. The work strongly influenced the modernist movement, in particular Rimbaud’s later prose-poems. Though inspired by *Gaspard de la nuit*, a work by Aloysius Bertrand, Baudelaire’s texts illustrate the Parisian life of his times, rather than Bertrand’s use of a medieval backcloth, and incorporate a number of themes and titles from Baudelaire’s earlier and more famous collection of poetry, *Les Fleurs du mal*.

The title of the work refers to the psychological meaning of the word *spleen*: an ill-tempered disgust with the world. Here, Baudelaire displays his views on good and evil, sin and pleasure, men and women, the artist and the philistine, time and mortality, solitude and the crowd, and much more.

Prologue: To Arsène Houssaye

My dear friend, I am sending you a little work of which one could not say, without doing it an injustice, that it has neither tail nor head, since all is, on the contrary, at once head and tail, in alternating and reciprocal fashion. Consider, I pray you, what an admirable convenience this construction offers us all, yourself, myself, and the reader. We can leave off, wherever we wish, I my reverie, you this manuscript, the reader their reading; for I do not choose to suspend the latter's restless will with an interminable fine-spun thread of a plot. Remove any vertebra and the two resulting parts of this tortuous fantasy will rejoin themselves effortlessly. Split it into numerous fragments, and you will see that each can exist apart. In the hope that some of these segments will be lively enough to please and amuse you, I dare to dedicate the whole serpentine creation to you.

I have a small confession to make. It was while leafing through, for the twentieth time at last, Aloysius Bertrand's famous '*Gaspard de la Nuit*' (has not a book well-known to you and I, and a number of our friends every right to be called *famous*?) that I had the idea of attempting something analogous, of applying to the description of modern life, or rather of *a particular* more modern and abstract life, the process which he had applied to the depiction of the life of previous times, so strange to us and picturesque.

Who among us has not, in his days of ambition, dreamed of the miracle of a poetic and musical prose without rhythm or rhyme, flexible and striking enough to be adapted to the lyrical movements of the soul, the undulations of reverie, the leaps of consciousness?

It is above all from frequenting enormous cities, from the intersection of their innumerable relationships that this obsessive ideal is born. Have not you yourself, my dear friend, attempted to translate the *glazier's* shrill cry to a *song*, and to express in lyrical prose all the mournfully suggestive sounds that his cry sends to the attics, through the most elevated mists of the street?

But, to tell the truth, I fear that my jealousy has not brought me luck. As soon as I had begun the work, I noticed that not only did I remain far from my mysterious and brilliant model, but also that I was achieving something (if it can be called *something*) singularly different, an accidental outcome of which anyone other than I would undoubtedly be proud, but which can only

deeply humiliate a mind which considers it the greatest honor of the poet to accomplish exactly what he intended to do.

Your most affectionate

C. B.

1. The Stranger (*L'Étranger*)

— Whom do you like best, enigmatic man? Your father, mother, sister or brother?

— I have no father, mother, sister or brother.

— Your friends?

— You employ a word whose meaning has remained unknown to me to this day.

— Your country?

— I know not at which latitude it is located.

— Beauty?

— I would love her willingly, a goddess and immortal.

— Wealth?

— I hate it, as you hate God.

— Oh! What do you love, extraordinary stranger?

— I love the clouds... the passing clouds... on high... the marvellous clouds!



'The Dream' - Henri Rousseau (French, 1844-1910)
Artvee

2. The Old Woman's despair (*Le Désespoir de la vieille*)

The wizened little old woman was full of happiness when she saw the pretty infant whom everyone celebrated, whom everyone wanted to please; that pretty being, as fragile as her, the little old woman, and, like her, also toothless and hairless.

And she approached him, desiring to smile at him, and make pleasant faces.

But the frightened child struggled on being caressed by the good, yet decrepit, old woman, and filled the house with his cries.

Then the good old soul withdrew into her eternal solitude, and wept in a corner, saying to herself: — 'Alas, for us unfortunate old females the age of pleasing even the innocent has passed; and we horrify the little children we long to love!'

3. The Artist's confession (*Le Confiteur de l'artiste*)

How penetrating the end of the autumn days! Ah, penetrating to the point of pain! Because there are certain delicious sensations whose vagueness does not exclude intensity; and there is no sharper point than that of the Infinite.

The pure delight of drowning one's gaze in the immensity of sky and sea! The solitude, the silence, the incomparable chastity of the azure, some little quivering sail on the horizon which by its smallness and isolation imitates my irremediable existence, the monotonous melody of the swell, all these things think through me, or I think through them (since, in the grandeur of reverie, the 'I' is soon lost)! They think, I say, but musically and picturesquely, without quibbles, without syllogisms, without deductions.

However, these thoughts, whether they emerge from me, or arise from things, soon become far too intense. The energies of pleasure create discomfort and positive suffering. My over-stretched nerves yield nothing but screamingly painful vibrations.

And now the depth of the sky dismays me; its limpidity exasperates me. The insensibility of the sea, the immutability of the spectacle, revolt me... Ah, must one suffer eternally, or flee eternally from beauty? Nature, pitiless enchantress, ever-victorious rival, leave me be! Cease from tempting me to desire and to pride! The study of beauty is a duel, in which the artist cries out in fear before being vanquished.



'Étretat, The Beach and the Falaise d'Amont' - Claude Monet (French, 1840-1926)
Artvee

4. A Jester (*Un Plaisant*)

It was the New Year explosion: a chaos of mud and snow, traversed by a thousand carriages, glittering with toys and sweets, teeming with greed and despair, the official delirium of a big city designed to trouble the brain of the most strong-minded solitary.

In the midst of this hustle and bustle, a donkey trotted briskly, harassed by a wretch armed with a whip.

As the donkey was about to turn the corner of a sidewalk, a handsome gentleman, gloved, gleaming, cruelly-bound in a cravat, and imprisoned in brand new clothes, bowed ceremoniously before the humble beast, and said to it, while removing his hat: 'I wish you well and happy!' Then he turned towards his unknown comrades with a fatuous air, as if to beg them to add their approbation to his complacency.

The donkey failed to see this handsome jester, and continued to trot, zealously, to wherever his duty summoned him.

On my part, I was seized, suddenly, by immeasurable rage against that magnificent imbecile, who seemed, to me, to concentrate within himself the whole spirit of France.

5. The Dual Room (*La Chambre double*)

A room that feels like a daydream, a truly spiritual room, where the stagnant atmosphere is lightly tinged with pink and blue.

The soul takes a bath of laziness there, flavored by regret and desire. — It partakes somewhat of the twilight, bluish and pinkish; a dream of voluptuousness during an eclipse.

The furniture takes elongated, prostrate, languid shapes. The furniture has a dreamlike quality; one might consider it endowed with somnambulistic life, like plants and minerals. The fabrics speak a silent language, as do flowers, skies, setting suns.

The walls lack artistic abominations. Relative to pure dream, to unanalyzed impressions, definite art, positive art, is a blasphemy. Here, everything has the adequate clarity and delicious obscurity of harmony.

An infinitesimal scent, one most exquisitely choice, with which is mingled a very slight humidity, swims in this atmosphere, where the slumbering mind is lulled by the sensations aroused by a warm greenhouse.

Muslin rains down abundantly in front of the windows and the bed; it flows into snowy cascades. On this bed lies the Idol, the sovereign of dreams. But how comes she here? Who brought her? what magical power installed her on this throne of reverie and voluptuousness? No matter? Behold! I recognize her.

Hers are the eyes whose flame traverses the twilight; those subtle and terrible orbs that I recognize by their fearful malice! They attract, they subjugate, they devour the gaze of the imprudent person who contemplates them. I have often studied them, those black stars that command curiosity and admiration.

To what benevolent demon do I owe being surrounded, thus, by mystery, silence, peace and perfume? O bliss! That which we generally call life, even in its most fortunate expansion, has nothing in common with this supreme life, which I now know and savor, minute by minute, second by second!

No! There are no more minutes, there are no more seconds! Time has vanished; it is Eternity that reigns, an eternity of delights!

But a dreadful, heavy knock sounded at the door and, as in some infernal dream, I seemed to receive a pickaxe-blow to the stomach.

And then a Ghost entered. A bailiff, come to torture me in the name of the law; an infamous concubine come to cry misery and add the trivialities of her life to the pains of mine; or an errand-boy from some newspaper editor who demands the rest of the copy.

The heavenly room, the idol, the sovereign of dreams, the Sylphide, as the great Chateaubriand called her, all that magic vanished at the brutal blow struck by the Spectre.

Horror! I remember now! I remember! Yes! This hovel, this abode of eternal boredom, is indeed mine. Here is the stupid, dusty, dog-eared furniture; the fireplace without flame or embers, soiled with phlegm; the sad windows where the rain has left furrows in the dust; the manuscripts, scrawled over, or incomplete; the calendar on which a pencil has marked sinister dates!

And that perfume from another world, with which I was intoxicated with a perfection of sensitivity, is replaced, alas, by a fetid odour of tobacco mixed with some nauseous dankness. One breathes, here and now, the rancidness of desolation.

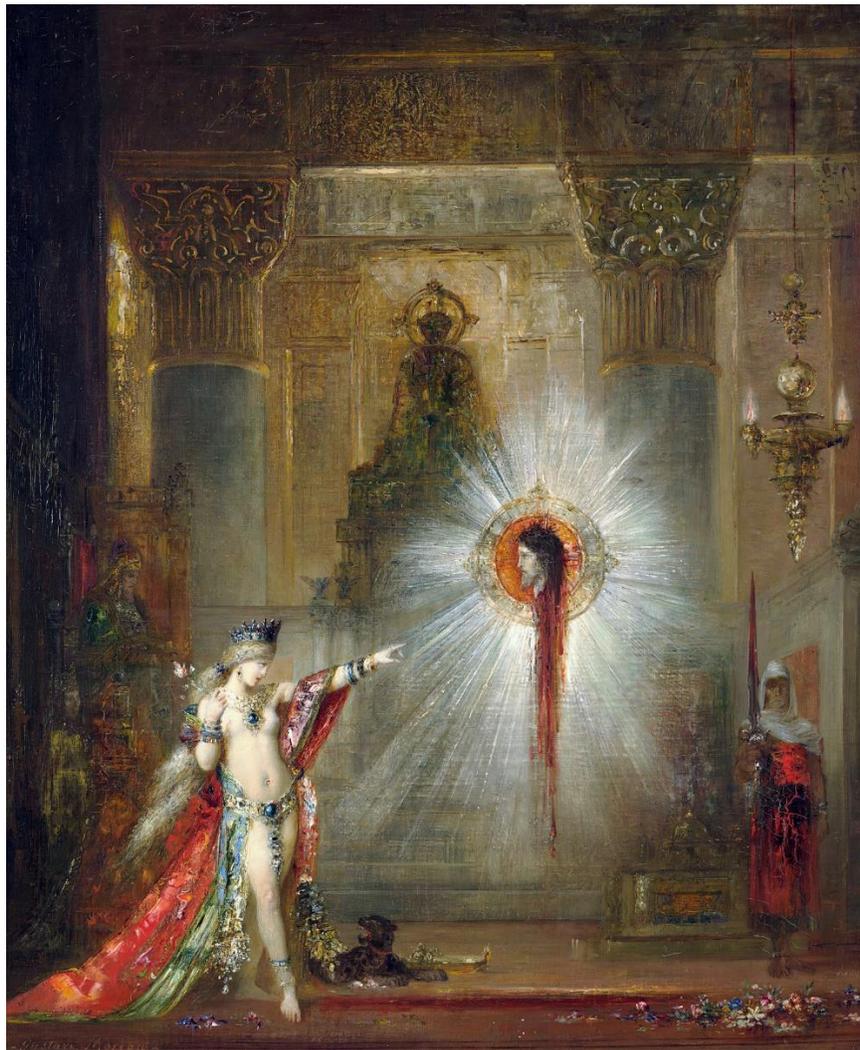
In this narrow world, so full of disgust, one familiar object alone smiles at me: the laudanum vial; an old and dreadful friend; like all friends, alas, rich in caresses and treacheries.

Ah! Yes! Time has reappeared; Time now reigns supreme; and with that hideous old creature have returned all his demonic cortège of Memories, of Regrets, Spasms, Fears, Anxieties, Nightmares, Angers and Neuroses.

I assure you that, now, the seconds are strongly and solemnly accentuated, and each one, springing from the clock, cries: — ‘I am Life; unbearable, implacable Life!’

There is only one second in human life whose mission is to announce good news, that good news which arouses, in all, an inexplicable fear.

Yes! Time reigns; he has resumed his brutal dictatorship. And he drives me on, as if I were an ox, with his forked goad. — ‘Yah, fool! Sweat, slave! Live, and be damned!’



'The Apparition' - Gustave Moreau (French, 1826-1898)
Artvee

6. Everyone their own Chimera (*Chacun sa Chimère*)

Under a wide grey sky, on a large dusty plain, without paths, without grass, without a thistle, without a nettle, I met several men bent over as they walked.

Each of them carried on his back an enormous Chimera, as heavy as a sack of flour or coal, or the equipment of a Roman soldier.

But the monstrous beast was not an inert weight; on the contrary, she enveloped and oppressed the man by exercising her powerful and elastic muscles; she clung with her two vast claws to the chest of her mount; and her fabulous head surmounted the man's brow, like one of those dreadful helmets with which ancient warriors hoped to increase their enemy's terror.

I questioned one of these men, and asked him where they were going, thus burdened. He replied that he knew not, neither he nor the others; but that they were evidently going somewhere, since they were driven by an unconquerable need to walk.

A curious thing to note: none of these travelers seemed irritated by the fact that a ferocious beast hung from their neck, and was fixed to their back; it was as if he considered it a part of himself. None of those fatigued and serious faces showed any sign of despair; under the splenetic dome of the sky, their feet bathed in the dust of a wasteland as desolate as the sky, they walked with the resigned countenance of those who are condemned to everlasting hope.

And the procession passed me by, and plunged into the atmosphere of the horizon, to the place where the curved surface of the planet eludes the curiosity of the human gaze.

And for a few moments I persisted in my desire to understand this mystery; but soon an irresistible Indifference descended upon me, by which I was more heavily overwhelmed than were they themselves by their oppressive Chimeras.

7. The Madman and the Statue of Venus (*Le Fou et La Vénus*)

What an admirable day! The vast park swoons beneath the burning eye of the sun, like Youth dominated by Love.

The universal ecstasy of things is not expressed by means of any noise; the waters themselves are as if asleep. Differing greatly from human celebration, this is an orgy of silence.

It seems as if an ever-growing increasing light causes objects to glitter more and more; that the excited flowers burn with a desire to rival the azure of the sky through the energy of their colors, and that the heat, rendering the perfumes visible, causes them to rise towards the sky like smoke.

Yet, amidst this universal enjoyment, I saw an afflicted being.

At the feet of a colossal Venus, one of those feigned madmen, one of those willing jesters charged with making kings laugh when Remorse or Ennui obsesses them, decked out in a brilliant but ridiculous costume, capped with horns and bells, huddled hard against the pedestal, raises eyes full of tears towards the immortal Goddess.

And his eyes declare: — ‘I am the last and most solitary of humans, deprived of love and friendship, and in that way far inferior to the most imperfect of creatures. However, I too am born to feel and understand immortal Beauty! Ah! Goddess, take pity on my sadness and my delirium!’

But implacable Venus gazes afar, at I know not what, with her marble eyes.

8. The Dog and the Perfume-Bottle (*Le Chien et Le Flacon*)

‘Nice dog, good dog, my little darling, come near and breathe in this excellent perfume, purchased from the best perfumier in this city.’

And the dog, while wagging its tail, which is, I believe, among those poor beings, the signal corresponding to smiling or laughter, approaches, and with curiosity sets its moist nose to the uncapped bottle; then, suddenly retreating in fear, barks reproachfully at me.

— ‘Ah! Wretched creature, had I offered you a dish of excrement, you would have sniffed it with delight and perhaps devoured it. Thus, unworthy companion of my sad life, you yourself resemble the public, to whom one

should never present delicate perfumes which only exasperate it, but rather ordure, chosen with care.'

9. The Wretched Glazier (*Le Mauvais Vitrier*)

There are natures purely contemplative and wholly unsuited to action, who nonetheless, gripped by a mysterious and unknown impulse, sometimes act with a rapidity of which they would have believed themselves incapable.

Those who, fearing to hear sad news from their concierge, wander in a cowardly manner for an hour or so in front of their door without daring to return; those who keep a letter for two weeks without opening it, or only resigning themselves to embarking, after six months, on an action that was needed a year ago, feel themselves precipitated, brusquely, towards action, by an irresistible force, as if by the arrow of a bow. The moralist and the doctor, who claim to know everything, cannot explain whence comes such mad energy, so suddenly, to these idle and voluptuous souls, and how, being incapable of accomplishing the simplest and most needful things, they often find, at a given instant, the excessive courage to carry out the most absurd and even dangerous acts.

A friend of mine, the most inoffensive dreamer who ever existed, once set fire to a forest to see, he said, if the fire caught as easily as is generally claimed. Ten times in a row, experience fails; but, at the eleventh attempt, it succeeds only too well.

Another, shy to the point that he even lowers his eyes before the human gaze, to the point that he has to summon all his poor will to enter a café, or pass the ticket-office of a theatre, where those in charge appear to him invested with the majesty of Minos, Aeacus, and Rhadamanthus, will suddenly leap at the neck of some old man, passing by, and embrace him enthusiastically before an astonished crowd.

– Why? Because... because that face appealed, irresistibly, to his sympathy? Perhaps; but it is more legitimate to suppose that he himself does not know why.

I have more than once been the victim of these crises and impulses, which lead us to believe that malicious demons slither into us, and make us perform, without our knowledge, their most absurd wishes.

One morning I rose in a sullen mood, sad, weary of idleness, and driven, it seemed to me, to deliver something great, an act of brilliance; and, alas, I opened the window!

(Observe, please, that the spirit of perversity which, in some people, is not a result of overwork or confusion, but of chance inspiration, partakes a great deal, if only in its ardent desire, of that mood of hysteria according to the medical men, or satanism, according to those who think more deeply than they, which drives us, without resistance, towards a host of dangerous or inappropriate actions.)

The first person I viewed, in the street below, was a glazier whose piercing, discordant cry reached me through the stale and heavy Parisian atmosphere. It would be impossible, however, for me to say why I was seized with so sudden and despotic a hatred towards the poor fellow.

– ‘Hey! You, there!’, I shouted, summoning him to ascend. However, I reflected, not without some cheerfulness, that, the room being on the sixth floor and the staircase very narrow, the man would experience some difficulty in making that ascent, while striking the corners of his fragile merchandise against many a surface.

At last, he appeared: I examined, with curiosity, all his panes of glass, and then cried: What? You have no stained glass? No pink, red, blue panes of which to form magic windows, paradisial windows? What impudence! You dare to wander the poorest quarters, yet you lack the very panes of glass designed to show life in all its beauty!’ And I pushed him, swiftly, towards the stairs, down which he stumbled, grunting.

I approached the balcony, seized a small flower-pot, and, when the man appeared through the doorway, let my engine of war fall perpendicularly to strike the rear ends of his carrying-hooks. The shock knocked him over, and ended up shattering all his meagre ambulatory wealth beneath his back, which emitted the brilliant sounds of a palace of crystal pierced by lightning.

And, drunk with my madness, I shouted furiously: ‘The beauty of life! The beauty of life!’

Such agitated pleasantries are not uttered without danger, and one may often pay dearly for them. But what does an eternity of damnation matter to one who has found an infinite moment of joy?

10. At One in the Morning (*À Une Heure du Matin*)

At last! Alone! All one hears is the rumble of a few tired and belated cabs. For a few hours we shall have silence, if not rest. At last! The tyranny of the human face has disappeared, and I will no longer suffer except on account of myself.

At last! I am allowed to take my ease in a bath of darkness! First, a double turn of the lock. It seems to me that this twofold turn of the key will add to my solitude and strengthen the barriers that truly separate me from the world.

Dreadful life! Dreadful city! Recapitulation of my day: having seen several men of letters, one of whom asked me if one could go to Russia overland (he probably mistook Russia for an island); having argued forcefully with the editor of a magazine, who answered every objection with: 'This is the work of honest people,' implying that all the other newspapers are written by rascals; having greeted some twenty people, fifteen of whom were unknown to me; having granted handshakes in the same proportion, and this without having taken the precaution of buying gloves; having ascended, in order to kill time, during a downpour, to the house of an acrobatic 'dancer' who asked me to design a costume for her, that of a devotee of Venus; having paid court to a theatre director, who said to me, on dismissing me: '— You would perhaps do well to contact Z...; he is the dullest, most foolish, and most famous of all my playwrights, with him you could perhaps achieve something. See to it, and then we will see;' having boasted (why?) of several unpleasant actions that I've never committed, and having, in a cowardly manner, denied some other misdeeds that I accomplished with joy, delighting in bluster, a crime against human respect; having refused to do a straightforward favour for a friend, and having given a written recommendation to a complete clown; ouf! is it truly over?

Discontented with everyone, discontented with myself, I would wish to redeem myself and derive some pride from the silence and solitude of the night. Souls of those whom I have loved, souls of those I have sung, strengthen me, sustain me, rid me of the lies and corrupting vapours of the world, and you Lord, my God, grant me the grace to produce a few beautiful verses, so as to prove to myself that I am not the lowest of men, that I am not inferior to those I despise!

11. The Wild Woman and the Little-Mistress (*La Femme Sauvage et La Petite-Maitresse*)

Truly, my dear, you weary me beyond measure, and beyond pity; one might say, hearing your sighs, that you suffer more than any sixty-year-old scavenger, more than any old beggar collecting crusts of bread at the tavern-doors.

If your sighs only expressed remorse, at least, they would do you some honour; but they only reflect the satiety of well-being and the lassitude of rest. And then, you never cease pouring out useless words: 'Love me deeply! I need it so! Console me here, caress me there!' Come, then, I shall try to remedy the problem; we will perhaps find the means, for two sous, in this entertainment, and without going far.

Let us consider, carefully, I pray you, this solid iron cage behind which moves, howling like the damned, shaking the bars like an orangutan exasperated by exile, often imitating to perfection, sometimes, the curving leaps of a tiger, sometimes the stupid waddling of a polar-bear, this monster with hair, whose shape vaguely imitates yours.

The monster is one of those animals that we generally call 'My angel!' which is to say a woman. That other monster, who screams at the top of his lungs, with a stick in his hand, is a husband. He has chained his lawful wife like an animal, and he displays her in the suburbs, on market days, with permission from the magistrates needless to say.

Pay close attention! Behold with what voracity (perhaps unfeigned!) she tears up live rabbits and squawking poultry thrown to her by her keeper.' 'Come' says he, 'you are not to eat all your spoils in one go,' and, with this wise speech, he cruelly rips away the prey, whose uncoiled guts are left clinging, for a moment, to the teeth of that ferocious beast; the woman, I mean.

Come! A good blow from that stick to calm her down! For she darts dreadful covetous glances at the stolen food. Good Lord! His stick is no theatre prop, do you not hear the flesh resound, despite the false hair? Her eyes, too, are leaping from their sockets, she screams in a most natural way. She gives off sparks everywhere, in her rage, like iron being beaten.

Such are the conjugal manners of these two descendants of Eve and Adam, these works of your hands, O Lord! The woman is incontestably wretched; though the titillating pleasures of notoriety are, after all, perhaps

not unknown to her. There are more irremediable misfortunes, and ones without compensation. Yet, in the world into which she has been thrown, she can never believe that women deserve a different fate.

Now for the two of us, my precious dear! Seeing the hellish forms with which the world is peopled, what would you have me think of your pretty form, you who only repose on fabrics soft as your skin, who only eat the tenderest cooked meats, and for whom a skillful servant carves the pieces?

And what can all those little sighs that swell your perfumed breast mean to me, my vibrant coquette? Or all those affectations learned from books, and that indefatigable melancholy, designed to inspire in the spectator a sentiment quite other than pity? In truth, I sometimes wish to teach you what real unhappiness is.

To see you like this, my delicate beauty, with your feet in the mud and your eyes turned mistily towards the sky, as if seeking a prince, one might liken you to a young female frog invoking the ideal. Though you despise the nonentity (which I now am, as you well know), shun the heron *that will seize you, swallow you, and slay you, at its pleasure!*

As poetical as I am, I am not as much of a dupe as you wish to believe, and if you weary me too often with your *precious* whining, I will treat you like *a wild woman*, or throw you out of the window like an empty bottle.'

12. Crowds (*Les Foules*)

It is not given to everyone to take a bath among the multitude: enjoying the crowd is an art; and he only can make, at the expense of the human race, a lively feast of it, in whom a fairy instilled, in his cradle, the taste for disguise and the mask, a hatred of home, and a passion for travel.

Multitude, solitude: equal and transposable terms for the active and fecund poet. He who knows not how to people his solitude, is equally ignorant of how to be alone in a busy crowd.

The poet enjoys this incomparable privilege, that he can, as he pleases, be himself or others. Like those wandering souls searching for a body, he enters, whenever he wants, into the character of each person. For him alone, everything is open; and if certain places appear to be closed to him, it is because in his eyes they are not worth the effort of visiting.

The solitary and pensive walker derives a singular intoxication from this universal communion. He who readily espouses the crowd knows feverish pleasures, of which egoists, closed like a coffer, and the lazy, enclosed like a mollusk, will be eternally deprived. He adopts as his own all the professions, all the joys, and all the miseries that circumstances present.

What men call love is very slight, restricted, and feeble, compared to this ineffable orgy, to this sacred prostitution of the soul which gives itself entire, its poetry and charity, to the unexpected that reveals itself to the passing stranger.

It is good to sometimes teach the happy folk of this world, if only to humiliate their stupid pride for a moment, that there are happinesses superior to theirs, vaster and more refined. The founders of colonies, the leaders of peoples, the missionary priests exiled to the ends of the earth, undoubtedly know something of these mysterious intoxications; and, amidst the vast family that their genius has made for itself, they must laugh sometimes at those who pity them for a fate so troubled and a life so chaste.

13. Widows (*Les Veuves*)

Vauvenargues says that in public gardens there are paths haunted mainly by disappointed ambition, by unhappy inventors, by aborted glories, by broken hearts, by all those tumultuous and shuttered souls, in whom the last sighs of a storm rumble, and who retreat far from the insolent gaze of the joyful and the idle. Such shady retreats are the meeting-places of those crippled by life.

It is above all towards these places that the poet and the philosopher like to direct their eager conjectures. There is sure nourishment there. Because if there is one region that they disdain to visit, as I insinuated earlier, it is above all that of the joys of wealth. That turbulence in the void has nothing that attracts them. On the contrary, they feel irresistibly drawn towards everything that is feeble, ruined, saddened, orphaned.

An experienced eye is never mistaken. In these rigid or dejected features, in these eyes, dull and hollow, or glittering with the last flashes of the struggle, in these deep and numerous wrinkles, in these steps so slow or spasmodic, he instantly deciphers the innumerable legends of love deceived, devotion gone unrecognized, effort unrewarded, hunger and cold humbly and silently endured.

Have you never noticed the widows on those lonely benches, the poor widows? Whether they are grieving or not, it is easy to recognize them. Besides, there is always something lacking in the mourning-dress of the poor, an absence of harmony which renders it the more heartbreaking. Poverty is forced to be economical. Wealth wears its grief entire.

Who is the saddest and most saddening widow, she who carries a toddler with whom she cannot share her reveries, or she who is completely alone? I am unsure... I once happened to follow an old woman, afflicted in this way, for long hours; she walked stiffly and erectly, cloaked in a little worn shawl, displaying with all her being a stoic pride.

She was obviously condemned, by her absolute solitude, to pursue the habits typical of an old bachelor, and the masculine character of her manner added a mysterious piquancy to its austerity. I know not how or in which wretched café she lunched. I followed her to the reading room; and watched for a long time while she searched the newspapers, with active eyes, once burned by tears, for news of some powerful and personal matter.

Finally, in the afternoon, under a charming autumn sky, one of those skies from which a host of regrets and memories descend, she sat apart in a garden, to hear, far from the crowd, one of those concerts whose regimental music gratifies the citizens of Paris.

This was doubtless the sole small debauchery of this innocent old woman (or this old woman purified by life), the well-earned consolation of one of those days that weigh so heavily, one without friends, without gossip, without joy, without a confidant, which God had burdened her with, perhaps for many years, three hundred and sixty-five days a year!

Then again: I can never help casting a glance, which if not universally sympathetic is at least curious, at the host of pariahs who crowd the grounds of some public concert. The orchestra hurls the sound of celebration, triumph, or pleasure into the night. The trailing dresses shimmer; eyes meet; the idlers, wearied by doing nothing, parade about, feigning, indolently, to enjoy the music. Here one sees nothing but wealthy, happy people; nothing that fails to breathe and inspire carefreeness and the pleasure of allowing oneself to live; nothing, that is, except the appearance of the throng over there leaning against the exterior barrier, catching gratis, on the breeze, a scrap of music, and gazing at the sparkling interior of this furnace.

It is always interesting to view a reflection of the rich man's joy in the depths of the poor man's eye. But one day, amidst that throng dressed in

blouses and cotton fabrics, I saw a being whose nobility made a striking contrast with her trivial surroundings.

This was a tall, majestic woman, so noble in all respects that I cannot remember having seen her like amongst all the gathered images of the aristocratic beauties of the past. A perfume of haughty virtue emanated from her entire person. Her face, sad and thin, was in perfect accord with the grand mourning in which she was dressed. She too, like the common folk among whom she mixed and whom she scarcely saw, viewed that luminous world with a profound gaze, and listened while gently nodding her head.

A singular vision! 'To be sure,' I said to myself, 'such poverty, if poverty there be, cannot admit of sordid economy; so noble the face that appears to me there. Why then does she voluntarily remain in an environment in which she forms so striking an anomaly?'

But as I passed by her, in my curiosity, I thought I divined the reason. The richly-clad widow was holding by the hand a little boy, dressed like her in black; However modest the price of entry, the amount would suffice perhaps to pay for one of the little fellow's needs, or better still, something superfluous, some toy or other.

And she must have returned on foot, meditative and dreaming, alone, always alone; because the child is turbulent, selfish, lacking in gentleness or patience; and cannot, like a simple creature, a dog or a cat, serve as a confidant to the sad and solitary.

14. The Old Acrobat (*Le Vieux Saltimbanque*)

Everywhere spread the crowd of folk on vacation, engaged in enjoying themselves. It was one of those solemn feast-days on which, for a long time, acrobats, conjurers, animal trainers, and itinerant traders have relied, to compensate for the seasons of bad weather.

It seems to me that, on such days, people forget all their work and suffering; they become like little children. For the common crowd, it's the horrors of school suspended for twenty-four hours. For their masters it's an armistice concluded with the maleficent powers of life, a respite from universal conflict and struggle.

Even the man-of-the-world and the man engaged in spiritual labour find it difficult to escape the influence of this popular feast. They absorb, without wanting to, their share of the carefree atmosphere. For myself, I

never fail, as a true Parisian, to view all the booths on parade at these solemn times.

They were, in truth, in formidable competition: they squawked, bellowed, howled. It was a mix of screams, brassy detonations, and aerial explosions. The swarthy-faced clowns and jesters convulsed their features, shriveled by wind, rain and sun, and, with the aplomb of actors sure of their effects, threw out witticisms and jokes as solid and heavy as those of Molière. The various versions of Hercules, proud of the enormity of their limbs, lacking brows or craniums, like orangutans, lounged majestically clad in tights washed for the occasion the previous day. The dancers, as beautiful as fairies or princesses, jumped and cavorted beneath the fiery lanterns that made their skirts sparkle.

All was light, dust, cries, joy, tumult; some spent, others profited, both equally joyful. Children hung on their mother's petticoats to obtain a stick of sugar, or climbed on their father's shoulders to win a better view of the conjurer, dazzling them like a god. And everywhere, dominating all the scents, lingered a smell of fried food, which was the incense to this celebration.

At the end, at the far end of the row of booths, as if he had exiled himself, in shame, from all these splendors, I saw a poor acrobat, bent, hunched over, decrepit, a ruin of a man, leaning against one of the posts of his booth; a booth more wretched than that of the most stupid savage, the distressed state of which two candle-ends, pouring out smoke, nonetheless illuminated all too well.

Everywhere else was joy, profit, debauchery; everywhere the certainty of bread for tomorrow; everywhere a frenzied explosion of vitality. Here, absolute poverty, poverty dressed, to heighten its horror, in comedic rags, a contrast introduced far more by necessity than art. He was not laughing, the poor wretch! He gave no cry, danced not, made no gesticulation, uttered no shouts; he sang no song, neither joyful nor lamentable, he did not seek to attract. He was silent and motionless. He had renounced, he had abdicated. His fate was sealed.

But what a deep, unforgettable gaze he cast upon the lights, and the crowd whose constant flow ceased a few paces from his repulsive wretchedness! I felt my throat squeezed in the dreadful grip of hysteria, and my eyes, it seemed to me, were offended by rebellious tears which did not wish to fall.

What could I do? What was the point of asking the unfortunate man what curiosities, what wonders he had to show in the stinking darkness behind his torn curtain? In truth, I dared not; and, even if the reason for my reticence makes you laugh, I admit that I went in fear of humiliating him. I had, at last, decided to drop some coins onto the boards, hoping he would divine my intention, when a powerful ebb of people, caused by I know not what disturbance, swept me away from him.

On returning, obsessed by this vision, I tried to analyse my sudden pain, and said to myself: I have seen, just now, the image of the old literary fellow who survives the generation which he has once entertained so brilliantly; the old poet devoid of friends, family, or children; degraded by poverty and public ingratitude; into whose booth the neglectful world no longer desires to enter!



'Equestrienne (At the Cirque Fernando)' - Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (French, 1864-1901)
Artvee

15: The Cake (*Le Gâteau*)

I was travelling. The landscape, in the midst of which I was placed, was of irresistible grandeur and nobility. Something undoubtedly passed through my soul at that moment. My thoughts fluttered with a lightness equal to that of the atmosphere; vulgar passions, such as hatred and profane love, now appeared to me as distant as the clouds which moved through the depths beneath my feet; my soul seemed to me as vast and pure as the dome of the sky in which I was enveloped; the memory of terrestrial things only reached my heart in weakened and diminished form, like the sound of the bell from a herd of cattle that grazed, imperceptibly, far, far away, on the slope of another mountain. On the small still lake, black due to its immense depth, the shadow of a cloud sometimes passed, like the reflection of the mantle of an aerial giant flying across the sky. And I remember that the rare and solemn sensation caused by its immense, perfectly silent motion, filled me with joy mixed with fear. In short, I felt, thanks to the enthusiasm engendered by the beauty with which I was surrounded, at perfect peace with myself, and with the universe; I even believe that, in my state of perfect beatitude and total forgetfulness of all earthly evil, I found the newspapers, that claim that man is born good, no longer so ridiculous; — when inescapable matter renewed its demands, I thought of easing the fatigue and relieving the appetite caused by such a long ascent. I took from my pocket a large piece of bread, a leather cup, and a bottle of a certain elixir that pharmacists sold to tourists at that time to be mixed, now and then, with melt-water.

I was quietly slicing the bread, when the slightest of sounds made me look up. Before me stood a little ragged, black and disheveled, creature, whose hollow, fierce, pleading eyes devoured the piece of bread before me. And I heard him sigh, in a low and hoarse voice, the word: *cake!* I couldn't help but laugh when I heard the term with which he wanted to honour my almost-white bread, and I cut a goodly slice, and offered it to him. He approached, slowly, never removing his gaze from the object of his desire; then, snatching the piece with his hand, drew back swiftly, as if he feared that my offer was insincere or that I already repented of it.

But at that very moment he was knocked aside by another little savage, who had come from I know not where, one so exactly similar to the first that he could have been taken for his twin brother. Together they rolled on the ground, fighting over the precious spoil, neither it seemed wishing to

sacrifice half of it to his brother. The first, exasperated, grabbed the second by the hair; he gripped his ear with his teeth and spat out a small bloody piece with a superb curse in the local patois. The rightful owner of the cake tried to sink his little nails into the usurper's eyes; he, in turn, applied all his strength to strangling his opponent with one hand, while attempting, with the other, to slip the prize derived from this duel into his pocket. But, revived by despair, the loser arose, and tumbled the winner to the ground with a headbutt to the stomach. What would be the point of describing the hideous struggle that indeed lasted longer than their childish strength seemed to promise? The cake traveled from hand to hand, and changed pockets at every moment; but, alas, it also changed volume; and when at last, exhausted, panting, bleeding and unable to continue they ceased, they no longer had, to speak truthfully, reason to fight; the piece of bread had vanished, scattered in tiny crumbs akin to the grains of sand with which they now mingled.

This spectacle had clouded the landscape for me, and the calm joy, which had amazed my soul before viewing these little fellows, had wholly disappeared; I remained saddened by it for a good long time, repeating to myself endlessly: 'There is then a fine country where bread is called *cake*, a delicacy so rare that it is enough to cause a perfectly fratricidal war!'

16: The Clock (*L'Horlogue*)

The Chinese tell the hour by gazing into a cat's eyes.

One day a missionary, walking in the suburbs of Nanking, noticed that he had forgotten his watch, and asked a little boy what time it was.

That urchin of the Celestial Empire hesitated at first; then, reconsidering, replied: 'I'll tell you.' A few moments later, he reappeared, holding in his arms a very large cat, and gazing, as they say, into the whites of its eyes, he affirmed without hesitation: 'It's not quite noon yet.' Which was true.

For myself, if I lean towards the lovely Feline, so aptly named, who is at one and the same time the honour of her sex, the pride of my heart, and the perfume of my spirit, whether at night, or during the day, whether beneath a bright light or in opaque shadow, I always see, in the depths of her adorable eyes, the time distinctly marked, and ever the same, a vast, solemn hour, as extensive as space, without division into minutes or seconds, — a

motionless hour which is not indicated on the clocks, and yet is light as a sigh, rapid as a glance.

And if some importunate person came and disturbed me while my gaze rested on this delightful dial, if some dishonest and intolerant Genie, some Demon of inopportune time came and said to me: 'What are you looking at there, so intently? What are you searching for in the eyes of this being? Do you wish to mark the hour there, prodigal and lazy mortal?' I would answer without hesitation: 'Yes, I mark the hour; it's the hour of Eternity!'

Is this, madame, not a truly meritorious madrigal, as emphatic as yourself? In truth, I had so much pleasure embroidering this pretentious piece of gallantry, I will not ask aught of you, in return.

17. A Hemisphere in a Head of Hair (*Un Hémisphère dans une Chevelure*)

Let me breathe for long, long hours, the odour of your hair, plunge my whole face into it there, as a thirsty man plunges his face in a stream, and shake it about with my hand like a fragrant handkerchief, to shake memories into the air.

If you could only know all that I see! All that I sense! All that I hear in your hair! My soul travels by means of perfume as the souls of others by means of music.

Your tresses contain a whole dreamlike scene, full of sails and masts; they contain vast seas whose monsoons carry me towards delightful climes, where space is deeper and bluer, where the atmosphere is perfumed by fruits, by leaves, and the surface of human skin.

In the ocean of your hair, I glimpse a harbour teeming with melancholy songs, vigorous men of every nation, and ships of all kinds that display their fine and complex structures against the immense sky basking in eternal heat.

In the caresses of your hair, I find again the languor of long hours spent on some divan, in the cabin of some graceful vessel, lulled by the imperceptible rolling of the harbour's waves, amidst pots of flowers, and refreshing drinks.

In the fiery bed of your hair, I breathe the scent of tobacco mingled with opium and sugar; in the nocturnal depths of your hair, I see the glow of

an infinite tropical azure; on the downy shores of your hair, I am intoxicated by the combined odour of tar, and musk, and coconut oil.

Let me bite your heavy, black tresses for hours. When I bite your elastic and rebellious hair, it seems to me I am consuming memories.

18. The Invitation to the Voyage (*L'Invitation au voyage*)

There's a magnificent land, a land of Cockaigne, they say, that I've dreamed of visiting with a dear mistress. A unique land, drowned in our Northern mists, that you might call the Orient of the West, the China of Europe, so freely is warm and capricious Fantasy expressed there, so patiently and thoroughly has she adorned it with rare and luxuriant plants.

A true land of Cockaigne, where all is lovely, rich, tranquil, honest: where luxury delights in reflecting itself as order: where life is full and sweet to breathe: from which disorder, turbulence, the unforeseen are banished: where happiness is married to silence: where the food itself is poetic, both rich and exciting: where everything resembles you, my dear angel.

Do you know the fevered malady that seizes us in our chilly wretchedness, the nostalgia for an unknown land, the anguish of curiosity? There's a country you resemble, where everything is lovely, rich, tranquil and honest, where Fantasy has built and adorned an occidental China, where life is sweet to breathe, where happiness is married to silence. There we must go and live, there we must go to die!

Yes, there we must go to breathe, dream, prolong the hours with an infinity of sensations. Some musician has composed *The Invitation to the Waltz*: who shall compose *The Invitation to the Voyage*, that one might offer to the beloved, the sister of one's choice?

Yes, it would be good to be alive in that atmosphere, – there where the hours pass more slowly and contain more thought, where the clocks chime happiness with a deeper, more significant solemnity.

On gleaming wall-panels, on walls lined with gilded leather, of sombre richness, blissful paintings live discreetly, calm and deep as the souls of the artists who created them. The sunsets that colour the dining-room, or the salon, so richly, are softened by fine fabrics, or those high latticed windows divided in sections by leading. The furniture, vast, curious, bizarre, is armed with locks and secrets like refined souls. The mirrors, metals, fabrics, plate and ceramics play a mute, mysterious symphony for the eyes:

and from every object, every corner, the gaps in the drawers, the folds of fabric, a unique perfume escapes: the *call* of Sumatra, that is like the soul of the apartment.

A true land of Cockaigne, I tell you, where all is rich, clean, and bright like a clear conscience, like a splendid battery of kitchenware, like magnificent jewellery, like a multi-coloured gem! The treasures of the world enrich it, as in the house of some hard-working fellow, who's deserved well of the whole world. A unique land, superior to others, as art is to Nature, re-shaped here by dream, corrected, adorned, remade.

Let them search and search again, tirelessly extending the frontiers of their happiness, those alchemists of the gardener's art! Let them offer sixty, a hundred thousand, florins reward to whoever realises their ambitious projects! I though, have found my *black tulip*, my *blue dahlia*!

Incomparable bloom, tulip re-found, allegorical dahlia, it is there, is it not, to that beautiful land so calm and full of dreams, that you must go so as to live and flower? Would you not be surrounded by your own analogue, could you not mirror yourself, to speak as the mystics do, in what *corresponds* to you, in your own *correspondence*?

Dreams! Always dreams! And the more aspiring and fastidious the soul, the more its dreams exceed the possible. Every man has within him his dose of natural opium, endlessly secreted and renewed, and how many hours do we count, from birth to death, that are filled with positive pleasure, by successful deliberate action? Shall we ever truly live, ever enter this picture my mind has painted, this picture that resembles you?

Those treasures, items of furniture, that luxury, order, those perfumes, miraculous flowers, are you. They are you also, those great rivers and tranquil canals. Those huge ships they carry, charged with riches, from which rise monotonous sailors' chants, those are my thoughts that sleep or glide over your breast. You conduct them gently towards that sea, the Infinite, while reflecting the depths of the sky in your sweet soul's clarity: – and when, wearied by the swell, gorged with Oriental wares, they re-enter their home port, they are my thoughts still, enriched, returning from the Infinite to you.

19. The Poor Child's Toy (*Le Joujou du Pauvre*)

I'd like to suggest a means of innocent entertainment. There are so few amusements that are guiltless!

When you saunter forth, in the morning, with the decided intention of strolling along the high street, fill your pockets with little trinkets costing a sou — such as the cut-out Pulcinella moved by a single wire, the blacksmith who beats his anvil, the horseman on his horse whose tail is a whistle, — and along the fronts of the café-cabarets, at the foot of the trees, pay homage to the poor and unknown children you meet. You will see their eyes widen immeasurably. At first, they will not dare to accept; they will doubt their happiness. Then their hands will quickly snatch the gift, and they will flee like cats to eat, far from you, the morsel you gave them, having learned to mistrust humankind.

On a road, behind the gate of a vast garden, at the end of which appeared the white facade of a pretty castle struck by the sun, stood a clean and beautiful child, dressed in those country clothes which are so full of coquetry.

Luxury, carefreeness, and the habitual spectacle of wealth render such children so pretty that one would believe them to be made of a different mould than the children of mediocrity or poverty. Beside him, on the grass, lay a splendid toy, as clean as its master, varnished, gilded, dressed in a purple robe, and covered with plumes and beads. But the child was not taking care of his favorite toy, for this is what he was looking at:

On the other side of the gate, on the road, among the thistles and nettles, there was another child, dirty, puny, black with soot, one of those outcast brats whose beauty an impartial eye would discover, if, as the eye of the connoisseur detects an ideal painting under a coachbuilder's varnish, it was to clean it of the disgusting patina of poverty.

Through the symbolic bars separating their two worlds, the highway and the chateau, the poor child showed the rich child his own toy, which the latter eagerly examined like a rare and unknown object. Now, this toy, which the little wretch harassed, tossing it about, and shaking it, in a box with a barred grille, was a live rat! The parents, no doubt to save money, had provided a toy plucked from life itself.

And the two children laughed at each other, in a fraternal manner, with teeth of an *equal* whiteness.

20. The Fairies' Gifts (*Les Dons des Fées*)

There was a great gathering of the Fairies, to perform a distribution of gifts among all the newborns who had begun their lives within the last twenty-four hours.

Those ancient and capricious Sisters of Destiny, those bizarre Mothers of joy and pain, were all very diverse: some had a sombre and reticent air, others, a playful and mischievous one; some, young, having always been young; others, old, having always been old.

All the fathers who believed in Fairies had come, each bringing their newborn in their arms.

The Gifts: Faculties, Good Luck, unalterably beneficial Circumstance, were set before the court, like prizes on the platform at a distribution of prizes. What was unusual here was that the Gifts were not rewards for effort, but on the contrary a grace granted to those who had not yet lived, a grace capable of determining their destiny. and becoming as much the source of misfortune as of happiness.

The poor Fairies were very busy, since the crowd of petitioners was great, and the intermediate world, set between Humankind and God, is subject like us to the terrible law of Time and its infinite descendants, the Days, Hours, Minutes, and Seconds.

In truth, they were as stunned as ministers on a day of hearings, or employees of the Institutional Pawnshop, when a National Holiday permits free clearances. I believe that from time to time they even looked at the clock-hands with as much impatience as human judges who, having sat since morning, cannot help but dream of dinner, of the family, and their beloved slippers. If there is a degree of haste and chance in supernatural justice, let us not be surprised if the same is sometimes the case in human justice. In this matter we ourselves would be unjust judges.

Indeed, some blunders were committed that day which might well be considered bizarre, if prudence, rather than caprice, were the distinctive, eternal character of the Fairies.

Thus, the power to magnetically attract wealth was awarded to the sole heir of a very rich family, who, being endowed with no feelings of charity, nor any desire for the most visible possessions of life, was later to find himself prodigiously embarrassed by his millions.

Thus, the love of Beauty and poetic Power were given to the son of an obscure wretch, a quarryman by trade, who could not, in any way, assist in developing the faculties, nor relieve the needs of his deplorable offspring.

I neglected to tell you that the distribution of gifts, in these solemn matters, is final, and that no donation can be refused.

All the Fairies rose, believing their chore accomplished; since no gifts remained, no further largesse to scatter among all this human fry, when a bold man, a poor little tradesman I believe, stood up, and seizing by her dress of multicolored mist, the Fairy who was closest to him, cried: Oh! Madame! You've forgotten us! There is still my little one! I'd not wish to have come for naught.'

The Fairy might have been embarrassed; since there was nothing left. However, she remembered, in time, a well-known law, though one rarely applied in the supernatural world, inhabited by intangible deities, friends to humankind, and often forced to adapt to its passions, such as the Fairies, Gnomes, Salamanders, Sylphides, Sylphs, Nixies, Merfolk and Undines, — I mean the law which grants to a Fairy, in a case similar to this, that is to say a case of the exhaustion of lots, the possibility of granting one more, supplementary and exceptional, provided however that she has sufficient imagination to create it immediately.

So, the good Fairy replied, with an aplomb worthy of her rank: 'I give your son... I give him... the Gift of pleasing!'

'What? Of pleasing? ...Why that?' asked the stubborn little shopkeeper, who was undoubtedly one of those all-too-common rationalists incapable of rising to the logic of the Absurd.

'Because! Because!' replied the angry Fairy, turning her back on him; and, joining the long procession of her companions, cried: 'What do you think of this conceited little Frenchman, who wishes to comprehend all; one who, having obtained the best of gifts for his son, still dares to question and dispute the indisputable?'

21. The Temptations, or Eros, Plutus, and Glory (*Les Tentations, ou Éros, Plutus et La Gloire*)

Two superb Satans and a She-Devil no less extraordinary last night climbed the mysterious staircase by means of which Hell attacks a man's weaknesses while he sleeps, and communicates with him, in secret. They came and stood

gloriously before me, as if on a platform. A sulphurous splendour emanated from those three personages, detaching themselves from the opaque background of the night. They looked so proud and so full of authority that, at first, I took all three of them for true gods.

The face of the first Satan was of an ambiguous gender, and there was, also, in the lines of his body, the softness of the ancient Bacchus. His lovely languid eyes, of a dark and uncertain color, resembled violets still weighed down by the heavy tears of a storm, and his lips, half-opened, lit censers, which breathed out the fine odour of a perfumery; while each time he sighed, musky fluttering insects were illuminated by the ardour of his breath.

About his purple tunic was coiled, like a belt, a shimmering serpent which, with raised head, turned fiery eyes languorously upon him. From this living belt were suspended brilliant knives and surgical instruments, alternating with vials full of sinister liquors. In his right hand he held another vial whose contents were a luminous red, and which bore these strange words on its label: 'Drink, this is my blood, a perfect cordial'; in his left, a violin which undoubtedly served him to sing his pleasures and pains, and spread the contagion of his madness on Sabbath nights.

From his delicate ankles trailed sundry links from a broken gold chain, and when the resulting inconvenience forced him to lower his eyes to the ground, he contemplated, with vanity, his toenails, as brilliantly polished as well-wrought gemstones.

He looked at me with inconsolably heartbroken eyes, from which an insidious intoxication flowed, and he said to me in a singing voice: 'If you wish, if you wish, I will make you the lord of souls, and you will be the master of living matter, even more than a sculptor could ever be of clay; and you will experience the pleasure, constantly renewed, of emerging from yourself to lose yourself in others, and of attracting other souls to the point of confusing them with yours.'

And I replied: 'Thanks, indeed! I have nothing to do with such trash, beings who, doubtless, are no better than my poor self. Though I am somewhat ashamed of my memories, I've no wish to forget a thing; and even if I failed to recognise you, you old monster, your mysterious instruments, your dubious vials, the chains which entangle your feet, are symbols which reveal most clearly the disadvantages of any friendship with you. Keep your gifts.'

The second Satan had neither his air, which was both smiling and sad, nor those beautiful insinuating manners, nor his delicate and fragrant beauty. He was a large fellow, with a broad, eyeless face, whose heavy paunch hung over his thighs, and whose entire skin was golden and decorated, as if tattooed, with a crowd of little figures in motion illustrating the many forms of universal misery. There were small, scrawny men who hung themselves, voluntarily, from nails; there were little deformed, skinny gnomes, whose pleading eyes begged for alms, more so, even, than their trembling hands; ancient mothers carrying abortions clinging to their exhausted breasts; and many another.

The large Satan pounded his fist on his immense belly, from which came a long and resounding clank of metal, which ended in a vague moan made by numerous human voices. And he laughed, impudently, revealing his ruined teeth, with an enormous imbecile laugh, like certain men of all countries when they have dined too well.

Then he addressed me: 'I can give you that which wins all, which is worth all, and replaces all!' And he slapped his monstrous belly, whose sonorous echo commented upon his crude words.

I turned away with disgust, and replied: 'I've no need of anyone's misery, in order to enjoy myself; nor do I desire the saddening wealth, like wall-paper, of all those miseries represented on your skin.'

As for the She-Devil, I would be lying if I failed to admit that, at first sight, I found her strangely attractive. To define her charm further, I can compare it to nothing better than that of a most beautiful woman, past her prime, who nonetheless no longer ages, and whose beauty holds the penetrating magic of ancient ruins. She looked both imperious and gangling, and her eyes, though bruised, held a fascinating force. What struck me most was the mystery of her voice, in which I found memories of the most delicious *contralti* and also a little of the hoarseness of throats incessantly cleansed by brandy.

'Do you wish to know my power?' said the false goddess, in her charming and paradoxical voice. 'Listen.'

And she set to her mouth a gigantic trumpet, wreathed in ribbons, like a mirliton, with the titles of all the newspapers in the universe inscribed upon them, and through this trumpet she proclaimed my name, which thus rolled through space with the noise of a hundred thousand peals of thunder, and returned upon me, reverberating, in an echo from the furthest planet.

‘The Devil!’ I cried, half-captivated, ‘She’s something precious!’ But on examining that seductive virago more closely, it seemed to me that I recognized her, vaguely, from having seen her clinking glasses with some rascals of my acquaintance; and the hoarse sound of the brass trumpet brought to my ears the memory of some harlot’s turned-up nose.

So, I replied, with complete disdain: ‘Be off with you! I was not born to wed the mistress of certain folk I’ve no wish to name.’

22. The Shadows of Evening (*Le Crépuscule de Soir*)

Evening falls. A vast peace descends upon wretched spirits wearied by the day’s work; and their thoughts now assume the tender and indecisive colors of twilight.

Yet, from the heights of the hill a great howl reaches my balcony, through the transparent evening clouds, a howl composed of a host of discordant cries, that space transforms into a lugubrious harmony, like that of the rising tide rising or an awakening storm.

Who are those unfortunates whom the evening fails to calm, and who, like owls, take the coming of night for a sign of the Sabbath? The sinister chant comes to us from that blackened institution for the sick and destitute perched on the heights; and from the evening, contemplating, in wreaths of smoke, the rest of the immense valley, bristling with houses, each window of which says: ‘Here, now, is peace; here is the joy of family!’ I can, when the wind blows from on high, lull my astonished thoughts to this imitation of the harmonies of hell.

Twilight excites the mad. — I recall that I had two friends whom the dusk rendered quite wretched. One ignored, then, all the ties of friendship and politeness, and mistreated the first-comer like a savage. I saw him hurl an excellent plate of chicken, in which he thought he saw some insulting hieroglyph, at the brow of the head-waiter. The evening, precursor of profound delight, spoiled, for him, the most succulent things.

The other, a wounded man of ambition, became, as the daylight faded, more bitter, gloomy, and sarcastic. Forgiving and sociable during the day, he was merciless in the evening; and it was not only towards others, but also towards himself, that this twilight mania was so furiously exercised.

The first died mad, incapable of recognising his wife or child; the second bears within him the inquietude of a perpetual malaise, and though

he were gratified with all the honors republics or princes can confer, I believe twilight would still kindle in him a burning desire for imagined honours. The night, which brought its darknesses to their minds, brings light to mine; and, although it is not rare to see the same cause generate two contrary effects, it always intrigues and alarms me.

O night! O refreshing darkness! For me you are the signal of an inner celebration, a deliverance from anguish! You are, in the solitude of plains, in the stony labyrinths of a capital city, the scintillating stars, the bright explosions, the fireworks of the goddess Liberty!

Twilight, how sweet and tender you are! That rose-coloured light which still lingers on the horizon, like the agony of day at the victorious oppression of night, those flaring candelabras which stain in opaque red the last glories of the setting sun, those heavy draperies drawn by an invisible hand from the depths of the Orient, imitate all the complex feelings which struggle in the heart of man, in the most solemn hours of life.

One might even describe it as one of those strange dancers' dresses, where a transparent black gauze allows a glimpse of the full splendor of a glittering skirt, past delight transpiercing the dark present; the tremulous stars of gold and silver, with which it is strewn, representing those fires of fantasy which only shine brightly beneath Night's mourning robes.

23. Solitude (*La Solitude*)

A philanthropic journalist tells me that solitude is bad for human beings; and to support his thesis, he cites, like all unbelievers, the words of the Fathers of the Church.

I know that the Devil frequents arid places willingly, and that the Spirit of murder and lechery is set ablaze marvelously by solitude. But it may well be that such solitude is only dangerous for the idle and itinerant soul that populates it with its passions and chimeras.

It is certain that a speaker whose supreme pleasure consists of addressing us from the heights of a pulpit or platform, would be at great risk of running berserk, if he were on that isle of Robinson Crusoe's. I do not demand of my journalist the courageous virtues of a Crusoe, but I ask that he not level accusations against lovers of solitude and mystery.

There are individuals among our chattering classes who would accept the ultimate fate with less reluctance, if they were allowed to deliver

a copious harangue from the scaffold without fearing that the drum-roll ordered by the guards-captain, Santerre, would unexpectedly interrupt their speech.

I pity them not, since I suspect that their oratory effusions grant them a pleasure equal to those that others derive from silence and meditation; but I despise them.

I desire, above all, that my wretched journalist allows me to amuse myself in my own way. ‘So, you never feel the need,’ he asked me, in a most apostolic nasal tone, ‘to share your pleasure?’ Behold the subtle envy of this person! He knows that I disdain his, and tries to insinuate himself into mine, the vile spoilsport!

‘That great misfortune of being unable to be alone! ...’ says La Bruyère somewhere, as if to shame all those who run to lose themselves in the crowd, doubtless fearing that they will prove unable to endure themselves.

‘Nearly all our misfortunes derive from not knowing how to stay in our own room,’ says another wise man, Pascal, I think, thus recalling to their meditative retreat all those panicked people who seek happiness in movement, and in a form of prostitution which I might call fraternal, if I wished to employ the fine language of my century.

24. Projects (*Les Projets*)

While walking in a vast solitary park, he said to himself: ‘How beautiful she would look, in a complex and sumptuous court dress, descending, amidst the atmosphere of a lovely evening, the marble steps of a palace, facing the wide lawns and fountains! Since, by nature, she has the air of a princess.’

Later, traversing a street, he halted before a shop selling engravings, and, finding, in one box, a print representing a tropical landscape, said to himself: ‘No! It is not in a palace that I would like to share her dear life. We would scarcely feel at home there. Besides, those walls adorned with gold would leave no space to hang her likeness; in those solemn galleries, there’s not a single private corner. Clearly, this landscape is where I should dwell wherein to cultivate my life’s dream.’

And, while analyzing, visually, the details of the engraving, he continued, thoughtfully: ‘At the edge of the sea, a neat wooden hut, enveloped by all these exotic glowing trees whose names I forget... an intoxicating, indefinable odour in the air... a hut filled with the powerful

perfume of rose and musk... further away, behind our little domain, mastheads, swayed by the swell... around us, beyond the room lit with a rose-coloured light, dimmed by the blinds, decorated with fresh matting and heady flowers, with rare Portuguese rococo seats, of a heavy and dark wood (where she would rest, calm, fanned by the breeze, smoking tobacco blended with a mild opiate!), beyond the veranda, the cries of birds drunk with the light, and the chatter of little black girls....., and, at night, to serve as an accompaniment to my dreams, the plaintive musical whisper of the trees, the melancholy casuarinas! Yes, in truth, *there* is the setting I was looking for. What have I to do with palaces?

Further on, as he followed a broad avenue, he came upon an inn, tidy in appearance, where two smiling faces leaned from a window brightened by colourful Indian curtains, and immediately said to himself: 'My mind must be a vagabond indeed, to seek so far away what is so near to me. Pleasure and happiness are to be found in the first inn that comes along, in the inn of chance, so fecund with delight. A large fire, showy faience crockery, a passable supper, a bottle of rough wine, and a double bed with sheets that are somewhat coarse perhaps yet fresh; what better?'

And on returning home alone, at that hour when the counsels of Wisdom are no longer muffled by the hum of external life, he said to himself: 'I possessed today, in dream, three dwellings in which I took equal pleasure. Why oblige my body to change its place of residence when my soul travels so nimbly? And why execute the project, when the mere conceiving of it provides sufficient enjoyment?'

25. The Lovely Dorothee (La Belle Dorothee)

The sun overcomes the city with its fierce and terrible light; the sand dazzles, and the sea shimmers. The stupefied world cowers and takes its siesta, which is a kind of delicious death where the sleeper savours the half-conscious pleasure of annihilation.

Meanwhile Dorothee, strong and proud as the sun, advances into the deserted street, the only person alive at this hour beneath the immense azure, a gleaming black shape in the light.

She advances, gently swinging her slim torso on wide hips, her silk dress clinging to her, its pale pink tone contrasting sharply with the darkness

of her skin, and outlining, with exactness, the shape of her long waist, her hollow back, and her tapering throat.

Her red parasol, filtering the light, projects the crimson shadow of its reflections onto her dark face.

Her enormous mass of hair, which is almost blue in colour, pulls her delicate head back, and gives her a look of idle triumph. Heavy pear-shaped brilliants whisper, privately, into her charming ears.

From time to time, the sea breeze raises her flowing skirt by one corner, and reveals a superb glistening leg; while her foot, like those of the marble goddesses that Europe imprisons in its museums, faithfully prints its shape on the fine sand. For Dorothea is so prodigiously coquettish that the pleasure of being admired prevails over the pride of the liberated woman, and, though she is free, she walks shoeless.

She advances thus, harmoniously, happy to be alive and smiling a bright smile, as if she views a mirror, in the far distance, reflecting her approach and her beauty.

At the hour when the very dogs moan painfully in the sun that afflicts them, what powerful motive induces the idle Dorothea, beautiful and cold as bronze, to promenade thus?

Why has she left her little hut, so coquettishly arranged, whose flowers and mats make so perfect and inexpensive a boudoir; in which she takes so much pleasure in combing her hair, smoking, cooling herself or gazing into the mirrors set in her large feathered-fan, while the sea, which beats on the beach a hundred paces away, provides a powerful and monotonous accompaniment to her indecisive daydreams, and the iron pot, where a crab stew, made with rice and saffron, is heating, sends her, from the depths of the courtyard, its exciting perfumes?

Perhaps she has a meeting with some young officer who, on some distant shore, heard from his comrades about the famous Dorothee. She will not fail to beg him, being a simple creature, to describe for her the ball at the Opéra, and will ask if one can attend barefoot, as at the dances on Sundays, where even the old African women become wild and drunk with joy; and then, if the beautiful ladies of Paris are all more beautiful than her.

Dorothee is admired and pampered by everyone, and she would be perfectly happy if she were not obliged to pile coin on coin to buy back her little sister who is eleven years old, and who is already mature, and so beautiful! She will undoubtedly succeed, good Dorothee, the child's master

being so miserly, too miserly to understand any other beauty than that of wealth!



'Three Tahitian Women' - Paul Gauguin (French, 1848-1903)
Artvee

26. The Eyes of the Poor (*Les Yeux des Pauvres*)

Ah! You wish to know why I hate you today. It will undoubtedly be harder for you to understand than for me to explain; since you are, I believe, the finest example of feminine impermeability that one can encounter.

We had spent a long day together that seemed short to me. We had promised each other that all our thoughts would be mutual, and that our two souls would henceforth become one; — a dream which contains nothing in the least original, except that, dreamed by all men, it has been realised by none.

That evening, a little tired, you wished to sit down in front of the new café on the corner of the new boulevard, still full of rubble, yet already showing, gloriously, all its unfinished splendors. The café gleamed. Even the gas-light displayed the ardour of beginnings, and illuminated, in all its strength, the blindingly white walls, the brilliant sheets of mirrors, the gilding of the mouldings and cornices, the plump-cheeked page-boys

dragged along by dogs on leashes, the ladies smiling at hawks perched on their fists, the nymphs and goddesses carrying fruits, pâtés, and game on their heads, the Hebes and the Ganymedes presenting with outstretched arms a small Bavarian amphora, or a bi-coloured obelisk of variegated iciness; all of history and all mythology placed at the service of gluttony.

Directly before us, in the roadway, stood a brave fellow, about forty years of age, with a weary face and a greying beard, clasping a little boy by one hand and carrying, on the other arm, a little creature who was too feeble to walk. He had assumed the office of a nursemaid, and was allowing his children to enjoy the evening air. All were in rags. Their three faces were extraordinarily serious, while three pairs of eyes stared, fixedly, at the new café, showing equal admiration, though nuanced variously according to age.

The father's eyes said: 'How fine it is! How fine! It seems that all the gold of the poor world has been brought to adorn these walls.' — The little boy's eyes said: 'How fine it is! How fine! Yet it is a house where only people unlike ourselves can enter.' — As for the eyes of the littlest one, they were too entranced to express anything other than a profound and stupefied joy.

The ballad-makers say that pleasure improves the soul and softens the heart. The singing did so that night, as far as I was concerned. Not only was I touched by that family, those pairs of eyes, but I felt somewhat ashamed of our carafes and wine-glasses, more than we required to satisfy our thirst. I turned my eyes towards yours, my darling, to read my thoughts there; I was gazing into your eyes, so beautiful and so strangely gentle, into those green eyes, inhabited by Caprice, and inspired by the Moon, at the moment when you said to me: 'These people are unbearable, with their eyes wide as carriage doors! Can you not ask the manager to keep them away from us?'

How difficult it is to be in accord with one another, my dear angel, and how incommunicable thoughts are, even between people who love one another!



'The Third-Class Carriage' - Honoré Daumier (French, 1808-1879)
Artvee

27. A Heroic Death (*Une Mort Héroïque*)

Fancioulle was an admirable jester, and almost one of the prince's friends. But people dedicated, by the state, to comedic performance are fatally attracted to serious matters, and, though it may seem strange if ideas of patriotism and freedom should despotically seize the brain of a comedian, Fancioulle entered, one day, into a conspiracy initiated by a few disgruntled gentlemen.

There are good folk everywhere ready to denounce, to those in power, ill-tempered individuals who seek to depose princes and carry out a reformation of society without consulting it. The gentlemen in question were arrested, as was Fancioulle, and doomed to certain death.

I would like to believe that the prince was almost angered at finding his favorite actor among the rebels. The prince was no better nor worse than

others; but excessive sensitivity made him, in many cases, crueller and more despotic than his peers. A passionate lover of the fine arts, a refined connoisseur, he was truly insatiable as regards pleasure. As indifferent to others as to morality, a veritable artist himself, he feared danger from no foe but Ennui, and the bizarre efforts he made to flee or to conquer that earthly tyrant would certainly have caused a strict historian to endow him with the epithet 'monster', if it had been permitted, within his domains, to pen anything which did not tend solely to please or to cause astonishment, which is one of the subtlest forms of pleasure. The great misfortune of this prince was that he had never possessed a large enough stage for his genius. There are young Neros who suffocate within too narrow limits, and whose name and good intentions may always be unknown to future centuries. Improvident Providence had endowed him with faculties greater than his realm.

A sudden rumour spread that this sovereign wished to pardon all the conspirators; its source being the announcement of a lavish spectacle where Fanciouille was to play one of his principal and finest roles, and which, it was said, even the condemned gentlemen would attend; an obvious sign, added superficial minds, of the benevolent tendencies of the offended prince.

From a man so innately and deliberately eccentric, anything was possible, even virtue, even clemency, especially if he lived in hopes of finding unexpected pleasure there. But for those, like myself, who have been able to penetrate deeper into the depths of this curious and sick soul, it was infinitely more likely that the prince wanted to judge the worth of the theatrical ability possessed by a man condemned to death. He wished to take advantage of this opportunity to carry out a physiological experiment of high interest, and to verify to what extent the usual faculties of an artist would be altered or modified by the extraordinary situation in which he found himself; beyond that, was there in his soul a more or less definite thought of showing clemency? That is a point that has never been clarified.

When the great day finally arrived, his little court displayed all its pomp, and it would be difficult to imagine, unless one had seen it, all the splendours that the privileged class of a small state, with limited resources, can display, in the way of true solemnity. This was doubly the case, first as regards the enchantment provided by the luxury displayed, and then by the arcane moral interest attached to it.

Monsieur Fanciouille excelled especially in silent roles or roles with few words, which are often the main ones in those magical dramas whose object is to represent, symbolically, the mysteries of life. He entered the stage lightly and with perfect ease, which helped to strengthen, among the noble audience, the idea of gentleness and forgiveness.

When we say of an actor: 'There's a fine actor', we use a formula which implies that beneath the character we can still divine the actor, that is to say artistry, effort, and will. Now, if an actor contrived to be, in relation to the character he is responsible for expressing, what the best statues of antiquity, if miraculously animated, living, walking, and gazing about them, might present in relation to the common and confused idea of beauty, it would undoubtedly prove a singular and wholly unforeseen thing. Fanciouille achieved, that evening, a perfect realisation of the ideal, which it was impossible not to deem alive, credible, and real. The jester moved to and fro, laughed, cried, convulsed, with an indestructible halo above his head, a halo invisible to all, except myself, in which the rays of Art and the glory of Martyrdom were combined. Fanciouille introduced, by I know not what special grace, the divine and the supernatural, into even the most extravagant antics. My pen trembles, and tears of ever-present emotion fill my eyes as I try to describe that unforgettable evening to you. Fanciouille proved to me, in an imperious and irrefutable manner, that the intoxication of Art is more capable than anything else of veiling the terrors of the abyss; that genius can play comedy at the edge of the grave with a joy which prevents it from seeing the grave; lost, as it is, in a paradise excluding all idea of the grave and of annihilation.

The entire audience, however jaded and frivolous it may have been, soon submitted to the artist's all-powerful and dominant performance. None now dreamed of death, or mourning, or torment. All abandoned themselves, without anxiety, to the multiple pleasures that the sight of a living artistic masterpiece yields. Repeated explosions of joy and admiration shook the vaults of the building with the force of continual peals of thunder. The prince himself, intoxicated, added his applause to that of his court.

However, to a clairvoyant eye, his intoxication was not unmixed. Was it that he felt his despotic powers had been overcome, that he had been humbled as regards the art of terrifying hearts and numbing minds, or was simply frustrated in his wishes, his expectations flouted? Such suppositions, not exactly verified, but not absolutely impossible, crossed my mind while I

contemplated the prince's face, where a new pallor continually augmented his usual paleness, as snow is heaped on snow. His lips narrowed more and more, his eyes were alight with an inner fire akin to that of jealousy and resentment, even as he applauded, ostentatiously, the talents of his old friend, the curious jester, who grumbled so ably at death. At a certain moment, I saw His Highness lean towards a little page, placed behind him, and speak into his ear. The mischievous face of the pretty child was illuminated by a smile; and he left the sovereign's box swiftly, as if on an urgent errand.

A few minutes later a sharp, prolonged whistle interrupted Fanciouille during one of his finest dramatic moments, piercing both ears and hearts. And from the place in the room from which this unexpected disapproval had sprung, the child rushed away into a corridor, with muffled laughter.

Fanciouille, shaken, awoken from his dream, first closed his eyes, then almost immediately opened them, disproportionately enlarged, then he opened his mouth as if to breathe convulsively, staggered forward a little, backward a little, and then fell swiftly to the boards, dead.

Had the child's whistling, the sound striking as swiftly as a sword-blow, actually frustrated the executioner? Had the Prince himself guessed the homicidal effectiveness of his ruse? There is room for doubt. Did he regret his dear and inimitable Fanciouille? It is a tender and legitimate thought.

The guilty gentlemen had enjoyed a comedic spectacle for the last time. That same night they were erased from life.

Since then, several mimes, rightly appreciated in various countries, have taken the stage at the court of ***; but none of them have succeeded in recalling Fanciouille's marvellous talent, nor have they achieved the same recognition.

28. The Counterfeit Coin (*La Fausse Monnaie*)

As we left the tobacco shop, my friend sorted his change carefully; into the left pocket of his waistcoat, he slipped the small gold coins; into the right, the small silver; into his left trouser-pocket, a mass of sous, and finally, into the right, a two-franc silver coin which he had subjected to close examination.

'A distribution both singular and exact!' I said to myself.

We came across a poor man who held out his cap to us, trembling. — I know of nothing more disturbing than the mute eloquence of those pleading eyes, which contain at the same time, for the sensitive man who knows how to read them, so much humility, so much reproach. One finds something approaching this depth of complex feeling, in the tearful eyes of a dog being whipped.

My friend's offering was far more considerable than mine, and I said to him: 'You are right; after the pleasure of being astonished, there is nothing greater than that of delivering a surprise. 'It was counterfeit,' he replied calmly, as if to justify his prodigality.

Yet into my wretched mind, always busily thinking about noon at two o'clock (what a wearisome faculty nature granted me!), the notion entered, suddenly, that such conduct, on the part of my friend, was only excusable if fuelled by the desire to create an event in the life of this poor devil, even perhaps to discover the varied consequences, fatal or otherwise, that a counterfeit coin in the hand of a beggar might cause. Might it not multiply as valid coinage? Might it not result in his imprisonment? The owner of a tavern, or a baker, for example, might have him arrested perhaps as a counterfeiter or as a distributor of counterfeit money. The counterfeit coin might, just as readily perhaps, be, for a poor little speculator, the seed of a few days' wealth. And so, my fantasy ran its course, lending wings to my friend's thought, and drawing all possible deductions from all possible hypotheses.

But he interrupted my reverie, suddenly, by repeating my own words: 'Yes, you are right; There is no sweeter pleasure than to surprise a man by granting him more than he expects.'

I looked into his eyes, and was horrified to see that they shone with undeniable candour. I saw then that he had wished both to be charitable and to strike a good bargain by saving forty sous; by winning God's heart and acquiring paradise most economically; and, thirdly and lastly, by bearing the cachet of being a charitable man. I could almost have forgiven him for that desire for criminal enjoyment of which I had just now supposed him capable; I might have found it interesting, and singular, that he amused himself by cheating the poor; but I will never forgive him for the ineptitude of his calculation. We can never be excused for being wicked, but there is a degree of merit in knowing that we are; and the most irredeemable of vices is to commit an evil act through stupidity.



'The Cheat with the Ace of Clubs' - Georges de La Tour (French, 1593-1652)
Artvee

29. The Generous Player (*Le Joueur Généreux*)

Yesterday, amidst the crowd on the boulevard, I felt myself brushing against a mysterious Being whom I had always wished to know, and whom I recognized immediately, though I had never seen him before. There was undoubtedly a like desire in him, as regards myself, since he gave me, as he passed, a significant wink to which I hastened to respond. I followed him attentively, and soon descended behind him into a gleaming underground residence, which exhibited a luxury that none of the superior dwellings of Paris could approach. It seemed strange to me that I could have passed this prestigious lair so often without guessing its entrance. It exuded an exquisite, though heady, atmosphere which made one forget, almost instantly, all the tedious horrors of life; one breathed there a sombre bliss, analogous to that which the lotus eaters must have experienced when, landing on an enchanted island, lit by the glow of an eternal afternoon, they felt born within them, to the drowsy sounds of melodious waterfalls, the desire never to see their

homes, their wives, their children again, and never to return to the waves of the deep.

Strange faces of men and women could be seen there, marked by a fatal beauty, which it seemed to me that I had seen before in times and in countries which it was impossible for me to remember exactly, but which inspired in me a fraternal sympathy rather than that fear which is usually roused at the sight of the unknown. If I sought to define in any way the singular expression of their glances, I would say that I have never seen eyes shining more energetically with a horror of ennui and an undying desire to feel alive.

I and my host, beside whom I seated myself, were already old and fast friends. We ate, we drank all kinds of extraordinary wines to excess, and, a thing no less extraordinary, it appeared to me, that after several hours I was no more drunk than he was. However, the card-game, that superhuman pleasure, had interrupted at various intervals our frequent libations, and I must say that I had played and lost my soul, bound in part, with heroic carelessness and lightness. The soul is a thing so impalpable, so often of no use, and sometimes so embarrassing, that I felt, regarding its loss, only a little less emotion than if I had misplaced my visiting card, while out walking.

We smoked cigars for a long while, whose incomparable flavor and perfume roused in the soul a nostalgia for unknown countries and happiness, and, intoxicated with all these delights, I dared to cry out, in a fit of familiarity which did not seem to displease him, while seizing a brimming cup: 'To your immortal health, my old Goat!'

We talked about the universe as well, its creation and future destruction, and of the grand idea of the century, that is to say of progress and perfectibility, and, in general, of all forms of human infatuation. On this subject, His Highness never ceased to utter light and irrefutable pleasantries, and expressed himself with a sweetness of diction and a tranquil humour that I have not found in any of the most famous of the world's conversationalists. He explained to me the absurdity of the different philosophies which had until now taken possession of the human brain, and even deigned to confide in me some fundamental principles whose benefits and ownership it is not convenient for me to share with anyone. He did not complain in any way about the bad reputation he enjoyed in all parts of the world, assured me that he himself was the person most interested in the destruction of *superstition*,

and admitted to me that he had only once been afraid, in respect of his own powers, on the day when he had heard a preacher, more subtle than his colleagues, exclaim from the pulpit: ‘My dear brothers, never forget, when you hear the progress of the Enlightenment praised, that the Devil’s greatest trick is to persuade you that he does not exist!’

The mention of that famous orator naturally led us towards the subject of academies, and my strange guest assured me that he did not disdain, in many cases, to inspire the pen, the words and the conscience of pedagogues, and that he almost always attended all academic sessions in person, though invisibly.

Encouraged by this excess of kindness, I asked him for news of God, and if he had seen him recently. He answered me, with a casualness tinged with a certain sadness: ‘We greet each other when we meet, but like two old gentlemen, in whom innate politeness cannot wholly extinguish the memory of ancient grudges.’

It is doubtful whether His Highness had ever given such a long audience to a mere mortal, and I was fearful of abusing the privilege. Finally, as a shivering dawn whitened the windows, this famous character, sung of by so many poets and served by so many philosophers who work for his glory without knowing it, said to me: ‘I wish you to retain a pleasant memory of me, and to prove to you that I, of whom so much evil is related, am sometimes a *generous devil*, to use one of your vulgar expressions. In order to compensate you for the irremediable loss of your soul, I grant you the winnings you would have gained if fate had been on your side, that is to say the possibility of relieving and conquering, throughout your life, that strange affliction named Ennui, which is the source of all your maladies and all your wretched progress. Never will you form a desire, without my helping you to realise it; you will reign over your vulgar peers; you will receive flattery and even adoration; wealth, gold, diamonds, faerie palaces will seek you out and beg you to accept them, without your having made the least effort to earn them; you will change your homeland and country as often as your fancy dictates; you will be intoxicated with pleasure, in the absence of weariness, in charming lands where it is forever warm and where the women smell as sweetly as flowers, — et cetera, et cetera...’ he added, rising and dismissing me with a pleasant smile.

If I had not been fearful of humiliating myself in front of so large a gathering, I would have fallen, gladly, at the feet of the generous player, to

30. The Rope (*La Corde*) – To Édouard Manet

‘Illusions,’ my friend said, ‘are perhaps as innumerable as the relationships between men, or between men and things. And when illusion vanishes, that is to say when we see the being or the fact as it exists outside us, we experience a strange feeling, complicated partly by regret for the lost phantom, partly by the feeling of surprise induced by the sheer novelty of being face to face with the actual fact. If there is one obvious, trivial phenomenon, always alike in nature, and of a form that cannot be mistaken, it is maternal love. It is as difficult to imagine a mother without maternal love as a light without warmth. Is it not therefore perfectly legitimate to attribute to maternal love all the actions and words of a mother as regards her child? And yet listen to this little story, where I was singularly mystified as concerns this most natural of illusions.

My profession, as an artist, leads me to look attentively at the faces, the physiognomies, which cross my path, and you know the pleasure we derive from this faculty which renders life more lively and more meaningful for us than for others. In the remote neighborhood where I live, and where vast grassy spaces still separate the buildings, I often observed a child whose ardent and mischievous appearance, more so than all the others, first seduced me. He posed for me more than once, and I transformed him sometimes into a little gypsy, sometimes into an angel, sometimes into a mythological Cupid. I made him hold a vagabond’s violin, bear the Crown of Thorns and Nails of the Passion, or the Torch of Eros. I finally took so lively a pleasure in the drole nature of this little rascal that I begged his impoverished parents, one day, to hand him over to my care, promising to dress him well, to give him pocket-money and to impose no punishment on him other than cleaning my brushes and running my errands. This unwashed child became a charming little fellow, and the life he led at my house must have seemed like paradise to him, compared to that which he would have endured in his father’s hovel. Yet, I must say, he surprised me sometimes with singular attacks of precocious melancholy, and that he quickly showed an immoderate taste for sugar and liqueurs; so much so that noticing, one day, that despite my numerous warnings he had committed another theft of this kind, I threatened to send him back to his parents. Then I left the house, and my business kept me away from home for some while.

Imagine my horror and astonishment when, on returning home, the first object that caught my eye was my little rascal, my life's mischievous companion, hanging from the front of that cupboard! His feet were almost touching the floor; a chair, which he had doubtless kicked aside, was overturned beside him; his head was bent convulsively on one shoulder; his puffy face and wide-open eyes, staring with a dreadful fixity, initially presenting the illusion of life. To cut him down was not as easy a task as you might think. His body was already quite rigid, and I had an inexplicable reluctance to suddenly drop him to the ground. It was necessary to support him completely with one hand and arm, and, with the other hand, to cut the rope. Yet having done so, the thing was not finished; the little monster had used a length of very thin cord which had sunk deep into the flesh, and it was now necessary, with finely-bladed scissors, to probe for this cord between those two swollen folds, so as to free his neck.

I have neglected to tell you that I had called loudly for help; but all my neighbors had declined to come to my aid, faithful in this to the habits of civilized people, who never wish, I know not why, to interfere in the affairs of a hanged man. At last, a doctor appeared who declared that the child had been dead for several hours. When, later, we had to undress him for burial, the rigor mortis was such that, despairing of bending his limbs, we had to cut and tear the clothes to remove them.

The police officer, to whom, naturally, I was obliged to report the incident, looked at me askance and said: 'That's a bit fishy!' driven, doubtless, by an inveterate desire, and the nature of officialdom, to arouse fear, at every opportunity, in the innocent as well as the guilty.

There remained a supreme task to accomplish, the very thought of which caused me terrible anxiety: I had to inform the parents. My feet refused to carry me there. At last, I plucked up courage. But, to my great astonishment, the mother seemed unmoved, not a tear oozed from the corner of an eye. I attributed this strange behaviour to the extreme horror she must have experienced, and I recalled the well-known saying: 'The most dreadful grief is a silent grief.' As for the father, he contented himself with saying with a half-stupid, half-dreamy air: 'After all, perhaps it's better this way; he would likely have ended badly!'

However, while the corpse lay on my couch and I, assisted by a servant, was taking care of the final preparations, the mother entered my studio. She wished, she said, to see her son's body. I could not, in truth,

prevent her from plumbing the depths of her misfortune by denying her that last sombre consolation. Then, she asked me to show her the place where her little one had hanged himself.' 'Oh! No! Madame', – I replied, – 'that would distress you.' And, as my eyes turned, involuntarily, towards that funereal cupboard, I noticed, with a disgust mingled with horror and anger, that the nail had remained fixed in the wood, with a long section of the rope still trailing. I hastened, swiftly, to tear off those last vestiges of misfortune, but, as I was about to dispose of them through the open window, the poor woman grabbed my arm and said to me in an irresistible voice: 'Oh! Sir! Only, leave me that! I ask you! I beg of you!' Her despair had, doubtless, or so it seemed to me, maddened her, such that she was now seized with tenderness for that which had served as the instrument of her son's death, and wished to retain it as a dreadful yet dear relic. — And she grasped the nail, along with the rope.

Finally, finally, all was accomplished! All that remained was for me to recommence my artistic labours, even more vigorously than usual, to chase away, gradually, the image of that little corpse which haunted the recesses of my brain, and whose ghost, with its large, staring eyes wearied me. Yet the next day I received a host of letters: some from the tenants of my dwelling, others from neighboring houses; one, from the first floor; another, from the second; another, the third, and so on, some in a half-jesting style, as if seeking to disguise the sincerity of the request with an apparent show of humour; others profoundly shameless and badly-written, but all tending to the same end, that is to say, to obtain from me a piece of the fatal yet sacred rope. Among the signatories there were, I may say, more women than men; but none of them, believe me, belonged to the inferior and vulgar class. I have kept those letters.

It was then, quite suddenly, that a light appeared in my brain, and I understood why the mother was so keen to seize the rope from me, and by what form of trade she intended to console herself.

31. Vocations (*Les Vocations*)

In a beautiful garden where the rays of an autumnal sun seemed to linger happily, under an already greening sky where golden clouds floated like voyaging continents, four handsome children, four boys, doubtless tired of playing, were talking among themselves.

One said: 'Yesterday, I was taken to the theatre. In large sad palatial rooms, in whose depths one sees the sea and the sky, men and women, serious and also sad, but far more lovely and better-dressed than those one sees elsewhere, speak in a sing-song voice. They threaten each other, they plead, they grieve, and often press a hand to a dagger in their belt. Ah! It's very beautiful! The women are much lovelier and taller than those who come to visit the house, and though, with their large hollow eyes and inflamed cheeks they appear terrifying, one cannot help loving them. We are fearful, we wish to cry, and yet we are happy... And then, what is even more singular, it makes one wish to dress in the same way, to say and do the same things, and to speak in the same voice...'

One of the four children, who for a few seconds had ceased to listen to his comrade's speech and was observing, with a wondrous fixity of gaze, some point in the sky, said, suddenly: — 'Look, look there...! Do you see him? He is sitting on that little isolated cloud, that little flame-colored cloud, which moves so slowly. He seems to be looking at us, too.'

'But who is he, then?' the others asked.

'God!' he replied in a tone of perfect conviction. 'Ah! he is already very far away; soon you will no longer be able to see him. Doubtless he travels about, visiting every country. See, he's about to pass behind that row of trees which is almost on the horizon... and now he's descending behind the bell tower... Ah! One can't see him anymore!' And the child remained there, turned in the same direction, for a long time, staring at the line which separates earth from sky with a gaze in which shone an inexpressible look of ecstasy and regret.

'How stupid he is, with this fine God of his, whom only he can see!' said the third, the whole of whose little personage was marked by a singular vivacity and vitality. 'I'll tell you something that happened to me that has never happened to you, and which is a good deal more interesting than your theatre and your clouds. — A few days ago, my parents took me on a trip with them, and since the inn we stopped at didn't have enough beds for us all, it was decided that I would sleep in the same bed as my maid.' — He drew his comrades closer to him, and spoke in a lower voice. — 'It grants a strange effect, indeed, no longer to be lying alone, but to be in a bed with your maid, in the darkness. As I was still awake, I amused myself, while she was sleeping, by running my hand over her arms, her neck and her shoulders. Her arms and neck are far larger than other women, and her skin is soft, so

soft that it seems like writing paper or tissue paper. I found it so pleasant that I would have continued for a long time, if I hadn't been afraid, first of waking her, and then of I don't know what. Next, I buried my head in her hair which flowed down her back, thick as a mane, and it smelled as good, I assure you, as the flowers in the garden at this very hour. Try, when you can, to do as I did, and you will soon see!

The eyes of the young author of this prodigious revelation were, while telling his story, open wide in a kind of amazement at what he still seemed to be experiencing, and the rays of the setting sun, falling through the red curls of his disheveled hair, glowed like some sulphurous passionate halo. One could readily surmise that he would not waste his life searching for Divinity in the clouds, and would frequently find it elsewhere.

Finally, the fourth said: 'You know I scarcely have any fun at home; I am never taken to the theatre; my tutor is too mean; God cares nothing as regards me and my boredom are concerned, and I've no lovely maid to pamper me. It has often seemed to me that pleasure is to be found in forever marching straight ahead, without knowing where I am going, without troubling anyone, forever gazing at some new country. I am never happy anywhere, and always think I'd be better off somewhere other than where I am. Well! The last time the fair was held in the neighboring village, I saw three men who live as I would like to live. You fellows paid no attention to them. They were tall, swarthy and, though in rags, seemed very proud, possessing an air of complete independence. Their large dark eyes shone brightly as they made their music; music so astounding that sometimes it made you want to dance, sometimes to cry, or sometimes to do both at the same time, while you'd be driven mad if you listened to it for too long. One, scraping his bow across his violin-strings, seemed to be recounting a sorrow; the second, striking a little hammer on the strings of a small keyboard suspended from his neck by a strap, seemed to be mocking his neighbor's plaintive tune, while the third clashed a pair of cymbals, from time to time, with extraordinary violence. They were so pleased with themselves that they continued to play their wild music even after the crowd had dispersed. At last, they collected their takings, loaded their accoutrements onto their backs, and left. I, wishing to know where they lived, followed them from as far as the edge of the forest, and only then did I understand that they dwelt nowhere.

The one said: 'Should we pitch the tent?'

‘Faith! No!’ replied the second, ‘It’s a fine night!’

The third, while counting the takings, said: ‘These people have no feeling for music, and their wives dance like bears. Happily, within a month we’ll be in Austria, where we’ll find a kindlier people.’

‘Perhaps we’d better head for Spain, since autumn is near; let’s flee before the rains, so only our throats get wet,’ said one of the other two.

I remember it all, as you can hear. They each drank a glass of brandy and then fell asleep, their faces turned to the stars. At first, I wanted to ask them to take me with them, and teach me to play the instruments; but I dared not, doubtless because it’s always difficult to make decisions, and because I was fearful of being caught before quitting France.’

The lack of interest expressed by his other three comrades made me think that this little one was already misunderstood. I looked at him, closely; there was in his eye and in the shape of his forehead something of that fatal precociousness which usually stifles sympathy, and which, I know not why, inspired mine, to the point that, for a moment, I had the bizarre idea that here was a previously unknown brother of mine.

The sun had set. The solemnity of night had replaced it. The children separated, each departing, without realising it, to fulfil their destiny, and, according to chance and circumstance, scandalise those close to them, while gravitating towards glory or dishonour.

32. The Thyrsus (*Le Thyrse*) – To Franz Liszt

What is a thyrsus? In the mystical and poetic sense, it is a priestly emblem in the hand of priests or priestesses which celebrates the divinity of which they are the interpreters and servants. But physically it is nothing but a stick, simply a stick, a hop-pole, a vine-stake, sapless, hard, and straight. About this stick, in capricious meanders, flowers and stems disport themselves and frolic, these, here, sinuously fleeting, those, there, hanging like bells or upturned cups; while a glory which astonishes springs from the complexity of lines and the colours, which are tender or dazzling. Might it not seem as if these curving lines and spirals are courting the straight line that the stick presents, and dancing around it in silent adoration? Might it not seem that all these delicate corollas, chalices, explosions of and colour, perform a mystical fandango around the hieratic staff? And what imprudent mortal, moreover, shall dare to decide whether the flowers and the vines were made for the

staff, or whether the staff is only the pretext for showing off the beauty of the vines and the flowers? The thyrsus is the representation of your amazing duality, powerful and revered master, dear Bacchant of mysterious and passionate Beauty. Never has a nymph, maddened by invincible Bacchus, shaken her thyrsus over the heads of her distraught companions with as much energy and caprice as you your genius over the hearts of your brothers. — The staff is your will, firm, straight, and unshakeable; the flowers are the dance of your fantasy around your will; they are the female element performing its prodigious pirouettes around the male. Straight line and arabesque, intention and expression, rigidity of the will and sinuosity of action, the unity of the goal and the variety in the means of achieving it, all-powerful and indivisible amalgamation of genius, what analyst possesses the detestable courage to divide you and separate you?

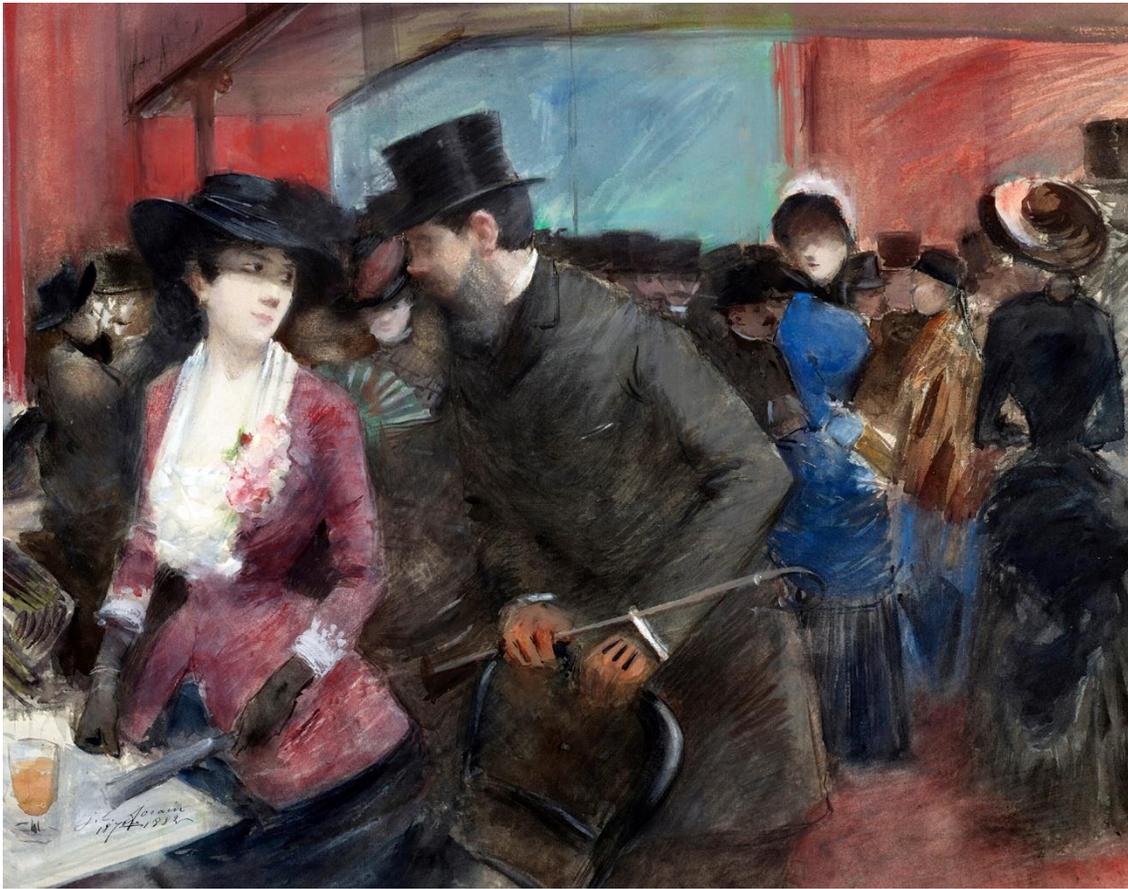
Dear Liszt, through the mists, beyond the rivers, over the cities where the piano sings your glory, where the printing-press translates your wisdom, wherever you are, in the splendors of the eternal city or in the mists of dreamy countries that Gambrinus consoles, improvising songs of delight or ineffable sadness, or confiding to paper your abstruse meditations, cantor of eternal Voluptuousness and Anguish, philosopher, poet, and artist, I salute you in immortality!

33. Be inebriated (*Enivrez-vous*)

One must always be inebriated. That's the long and short of it: that's the only answer. So as to avoid feeling the dreadful burden of Time, that breaks your shoulder-blades and bows you to the ground, you must intoxicate yourself without respite.

But with what? Wine, poetry or virtue, as you wish. But drink yourself stupid.

And if, sometimes, on the steps of a palace, in the green grass of a ditch, or the dreary solitude of your room, you awake, your intoxication diminished or already gone, ask the time of wind, wave, star, bird, or clock; of all that flees, all that moans, all that circles above, all that sings, all that speaks, ask the time; and wind, wave, star, bird, clock, will answer you: 'It's time to drink, till you're inebriated!' To avoid being the martyred slaves of Time, drink; drink endlessly to the point of intoxication! Wine, poetry or virtue, as you choose.'



'Folies Bergère' - Jean-Louis Forain (French, 1852 - 1931)
Artvee

34. Already (Déjà)

Already the sun had burst forth a hundred times, radiant or saddened, from that immense basin of a sea whose shores were such as to be scarcely visible; a hundred times it had sunk again, sparkling or morose, into its immense bath of evening. For many a day, we were able to contemplate that other hemisphere of the heavens and decipher the celestial alphabet of the antipodes. Every passenger moaned and groaned. It was as if the approach to land exasperated their suffering. 'When,' they cried, 'shall we cease to sleep a sleep shaken by the propellor-blades, disturbed by a wind that roars more loudly than we ourselves? Or digest our meals seated on a motionless chair?'

There were those who thought of their homes, who missed their unfaithful and sullen wives, and their shrieking offspring. All were so maddened by a vision of absent shores that, I believe, they would have eaten grass with more enthusiasm than the animal.

At last, the coast was visible; and we saw, as we approached, that it was of a magnificent, glowing land. It seemed, from as far as several leagues away, as if the music of life emanated from it as a vague murmur, and those coasts, rich in greenery of all kinds, exhaled a delicious smell of flowers and fruits.

At once all were happy, all relinquished their bad mood. All quarrels were forgotten, all mutual wrongs forgiven; declared duels were erased from memory, and grudges vanished like smoke.

I alone was sad, inconceivably sad. Like a priest whom one sought to tear away from his worship of the divine, I could not, without heartbreaking bitterness, detach myself from so monstrously seductive a sea, from a sea so infinitely varied in its fearful simplicity, which seemed to contain within itself and represent by its playfulness, its allure, its frowns and its smiles, the moods, the agonies and the ecstasies of all the souls who have lived before us, who live now, and who will live in days to come!

As I said farewell to this incomparable beauty, I felt dejected to the point of death; and that is why, when each of my companions says: 'At last!' I could only cry: 'What? *Already!*'

Nonetheless, it was the world, the world with its noises, its passions, its comforts, its festivals; it was a rich and magnificent land, full of promise, which sent a mysterious perfume of rose and musk our way, and from which the music of life reached us in amorous murmurs.

35. Windows (*Les Fenêtres*)

He who looks through an open window at the outside world never sees as much as he who gazes at a closed one. There is no deeper, blacker, more mysterious, more fertile, more brilliant object than a candle-lit pane. What we can see in the sunlight is always less interesting than what happens behind glass. In that hole, dark or luminous, life lives, dreams, suffers.

Beyond the sea of roofs, I see a poor middle-aged woman, prematurely wrinkled, forever bowed over something or other, who never leaves her room. From her face, her clothing, her gestures, from almost

nothing, I have recreated the history of this woman, or rather her legend, and sometimes I recount it to myself with tears.

If it had been a poor old man there, I would again have recreated his quite as readily.

And I go to bed, proud to have lived and suffered as other than myself.

Perhaps you will say to me: 'Are you certain the legend you've created is true?' What does it matter what reality is set before me, if it has helped me to live, to feel that I am, and what I am?

36. The Desire to Paint (*Le Désir de Peindre*)

Unhappy the man, perhaps, but happy the artist who is torn apart by desire!

I long to paint the one who appeared to me so rarely and who fled so quickly, like a beautiful thing relinquished, regrettably, by the traveler borne away into the night. How long it is since she vanished!

She is beautiful, and more than beautiful; she is amazing. In her blackness abounds: and everything she inspires is nocturnal and profound. Her eyes are two caverns in which mystery sparkles, vaguely, and her gaze illuminates like lightning: it is an explosion in the darkness.

I would compare her to a black sun, if one could imagine a black star shedding light and happiness. But more readily she brings to mind the moon, which has doubtless marked her with its formidable influence; not the white moon of idylls, resembling an ice-cold bride, but that sinister and intoxicating moon, suspended in the depths of a stormy night that is jostled by the flowing clouds; not the peaceful and discreet moon that visits the sleep of virtuous men, but that vanquished and rebellious moon, torn from the sky, that Thessalian Witches forced to dance on the terrified grass!

Behind her little brow dwells a tenacious will, and a love of the prey. Yet, from this disturbing face, whose mobile nostrils breathe-in the unknown and the impossible, emerges with inexpressible grace the laughter of a large mouth, scarlet and white, and delicious, which makes one dream of a superb and miraculous flower blooming amidst volcanic terrain.

There are women who inspire the desire to win them, and take pleasure with them; but she simply makes you long to die, slowly, beneath her gaze.



'Young Man at His Window' - Gustave Caillebotte (French, 1848-1894)
Artvee

37. The Gifts of the Moon (*Les Bienfaits de la Lune*)

The Moon, who is caprice herself, looked through the window while you were sleeping in your cradle, and said to herself: 'This infant pleases me.'

And she softly descended her staircase of clouds and passed noiselessly through the panes of glass. Then she bowed over you with the supple tenderness of a mother, and shed her tints on your face. Your eyes became green, your cheeks extraordinarily pale. It was while contemplating this visitor that your eyes widened so strangely; and she squeezed your throat so tenderly that you felt like crying forever.

However, in an expansion of joy, the Moon filled the whole room with a phosphoric atmosphere, like luminous poison; and all this living light mused, and said: 'You will suffer the influence of my kiss eternally. You will be beautiful as I am. You will love what I love and what loves me: water, clouds, silence and the night; the immense green sea; the water, unformed and multiform; the place where you are not; the lover you will never know; the monstrous flowers; the perfumes that render you delirious; the cats that swoon at the sound of the piano, and who moan like women, in a hoarse yet gentle voice!

You will be loved by my lovers, courted by my courtesans. You will be sovereign over those men with green eyes whose throat I also squeezed with my nocturnal caress; of those who love the sea, the immense, green and tumultuous sea, the unformed and multiform water, the places where they are not, the women unknown to them, the sinister flowers resembling the censers of some unknown religion, perfumes that trouble the will, and the wild, voluptuous animals which are the emblems of their madness.'

And that is why, dear spoiled and accursed child, I am lying here at your feet, seeking in your whole person the reflection of that formidable Divinity, that fateful godmother, that poisonous nurse of *lunatics*.

38. Which is Real? (*Laquelle est la Vraie?*)

I knew a certain Bénédicta, who filled the air with ideals, and whose eyes invoked a desire for grandeur, beauty, glory and all that makes one believe in immortality.

But this miraculous girl was too beautiful to live long, and she died a few days after I made her acquaintance, while it was I myself who interred

her, one day, when spring was shaking its censer, even in the cemeteries. It was I who buried her, sealing her in a coffin made of fragrant and incorruptible heartwood like to the coffers of India.

Yet, as I gazed, fixedly, at the place where my treasure was buried, I saw, all of a sudden, a little personage who bore a singular resemblance to the deceased, and who, trampling on the fresh earth with hysterical and bizarre violence, said, with a laugh: 'Here am I, the real Bénédicta! It's me, the famous imp! And to punish your madness and your blindness, you shall love me as I am!'

But I, in a fury, replied: 'No! No! No!' And to emphasise my refusal all the more, I struck the ground so violently with my foot that my leg sank up to the knee in the recent grave, and, like a wolf in a trap, I remained caught, perhaps forever, in the pit of the ideal.

39. A Racehorse (*Un Cheval de Race*)

She is ugly indeed. She is delightful though! Time and Love have marked her with their claws and taught her, cruelly, how every minute and every kiss bear away youth and freshness.

She is ugly indeed; she is an ant, a spider, if you will, even a skeleton; yet she is also refreshment, power, sorcery! in short, she is exquisite.

Time has lacked the strength to destroy the brilliant harmony of her gait, or the indestructible elegance of her frame. Love has left unchanged her sweetness of breath like that of an infant; and Time has not thinned her abundant mane from which breathes, in wild perfume, all the frenzied vitality of the French South: Nîmes, Aix, Arles, Avignon, Narbonne, Toulouse, those amorous and charming cities blessed by the sun!

Time and Love have bitten her, with their voracious teeth, in vain; they have failed to diminish the vague yet eternal charm of her boyish chest.

Worn perhaps, but not wearied, and always heroic, she brings to mind those thoroughbreds that the eye of the true devotee recognizes, even when she is harnessed to a hired coach or a heavy cart.

And then she is so sweet and so fervent! She loves as one loves in autumn; it is as if the approach of winter kindles new fire in her heart, while the submissiveness of her tenderness is untiring.



'The Horse Fair' - Rosa Bonheur (French, 1822-1899)
Artvee

40. The Mirror (*Le Miroir*)

A dreadful fellow entered, and viewed himself in the mirror.

‘Why gaze at yourself in the mirror, when what you see there only displeases?’

The dreadful fellow replied: ‘Sir, according to the immortal principles of seventeen-eighty-nine, all men possess equal rights; thus, I have the right to admire myself; and whether with pleasure or displeasure concerns my conscience alone.’

As regards common sense, I was doubtless right; but, from the point of view of the law, nor was he in the wrong.

41. The Harbour (*Le Port*)

A harbour is a charming place to linger for a soul wearied by life’s struggles. The grandeur of the sky, the forms of the flowing clouds, the changing colors of the sea, the glint of the lighthouses, are a prism wonderfully suited to entertaining the eyes without ever tiring them. The slender shapes of the ships, with their complex rigging, to which the swell grants harmonious oscillation, serve to maintain in the soul the taste for rhythm and beauty. And then, above all, there is a sort of mysterious, aristocratic pleasure for those

who no longer possess curiosity or ambition, in contemplating, from the view-point where they lie, or the breakwater on which they lean, all the movements of those who depart or return, of those who still have the strength of will, the desire, to travel or enrich themselves.



'The Port of Bordeaux' - Eugène Boudin (French, 1824-1898)
Artvee

42. Portraits of Mistresses (*Portraits de Maîtresses*)

In a men's boudoir, that is to say in a smoking-room adjoining an elegant gambling den, four men were smoking and drinking. They were neither young nor old exactly, neither handsome nor ugly; but old or young they bore the unrecognizable air of veterans of pleasure, that indescribable quality of cold and mocking sadness which openly declares: 'We have lived intensely, yet we still seek that which we might love and esteem.'

One of them initiated a discussion on the subject of women. It would have shown a more philosophical tendency if they had not talked at all; but there are intelligent people who, after a drink or two, do not despise trivial conversation. We listen, then, to the speaker, as we would listen to dance music.

‘All men,’ he said, ‘have been Cherubino’s age: that time of youth when, lacking dryads, we embrace, without disgust, the trunks of oak-trees. It is the first stage of love. In the second stage, we become selective. Being able to choose and deliberate is already a state of decadence. It is then that we definitely seek out beauty. For my part, gentlemen, I pride myself on having arrived, a long time ago, at the climacteric, the third stage of life, where beauty itself is no longer enough, unless it is seasoned with perfume, adornment, et cetera. I will even admit that I sometimes aspire, as if to an unknown happiness, to a certain fourth stage which must consist of absolute calm. But, throughout my life, except at Cherubino’s age, I have been more sensitive than anyone else to the annoying stupidity, the irritating mediocrity of women. What I especially like about animals is their candour. Judge how much I must have suffered from my last mistress.

She was a prince’s by-blow. Lovely, it goes without saying; otherwise, why would I have countenanced her? But she spoiled that great attribute by exhibiting an unseemly and perverse ambition. She was a woman who always wished to be a man. ‘*You are not a man!*’ ‘*Ah! if only I were a man! Of the pair of us, I am the man!*’ Such was the unbearable refrain which rose out of that mouth, from which I would have wished only to hear flights of song. Regarding some book, poem, or opera concerning which I had let my admiration escape, she would say, at once: ‘You think that’s high-art, perhaps? Do you know what high-art is?’ and begin to argue.

One fine day she took up the science of chemistry; so that now between my mouth and hers I found a glass mask. Accompanying it all, a lot of mumbling. If I sometimes made a gesture which brushed against her, one she felt was a little too amorous, she convulsed like a ‘sensitive’, as if violated...

— ‘How did it end?’ said one of the other three. ‘I’d not have thought you so patient.’

‘Fate,’ he went on, ‘brought about the remedy for the problem. One day I found my Minerva, who hungered so for the ideal, in a tête-à-tête with my servant, in a state which obliged me to withdraw discreetly so as not to make them blush. That evening, I dismissed them both, paying the arrears of their wages.

‘As for me,’ replied he who had interrupted, ‘I have only myself to blame. Happiness came to dwell with me, and I failed to recognise it. Fate granted me, recently, the company of a woman who was indeed the sweetest,

most submissive and most devoted of creatures, always open to everything yet without any show of enthusiasm! 'I am willing, since it pleases you.' That was her customary response. If you beat this wall or this sofa with a cane, you'd draw more sighs from it than the most frenzied efforts of love could draw from my mistress' breast. After a year of us living together, she admitted she'd never known pleasure. My disgust grew at so unequal a duel, and that incomparable girl married elsewhere. Later the idea came to me of seeing her once more, and she said to me, showing me her six lovely children: "Well, my dear friend, the wife is as much a *virgin* as was your mistress!" Nothing about her had altered. Sometimes I regret her: I should have married her.'

The others began to laugh, and a third said in turn:

'Gentlemen, I have known pleasures that you, perhaps, have neglected. I want to talk about the comedic element in love, a comedic element that does not exclude admiration. I admired my last mistress more than you, I believe, could hate or love yours. And everyone admired her as much as did I. When we entered a restaurant, not many minutes passed before all would forget to eat so as to stare at her. The waiters themselves and the proprietress at her counter felt this contagious ecstasy to the point of forgetting their duties. In short, for a time I lived tête-à-tête with a living *phenomenon*. She ate, chewed, crushed, devoured, consumed, yet with the lightest, most carefree air in the world. For ages, she brought me ecstasy. She had a sweet, dreamy, English, romantic way of saying: "I'm famished!" And repeated those words, day and night, while revealing the prettiest teeth in the world, in a manner which would have touched and cheered you at the same time. —I could have made my fortune showing her at fairs as a *polyphagous monster*. I fed her well; and yet she left me — doubtless for a food-merchant? — Well, or someone similar, an employee of some sort in the supply corps who, through some trick known only to himself, perhaps, provides this poor child with several soldiers' worth of rations. At least that's what I assume.'

— 'I,' said the fourth, 'endured atrocious suffering due to the opposite of what the selfish female is generally reproached for. I find you ill-advised, you too-fortunate mortals, in complaining as regards the imperfections of your mistresses!'

This was said in a most serious tone, by a man with a gentle, calm appearance, and an almost clerical physiognomy, illuminated, sadly, by light

gray eyes, those eyes whose look says: 'I wish!' or: 'You must!' or: 'I never forgive!'

"If, as nervous as I know you to be, my dear G... or as cowardly and superficial as you two are, K... and J..., you had been coupled with a certain woman of my acquaintance, you would have fled, or died. I survived, as you see. Imagine a woman incapable of committing an error of feeling or calculation; imagine a desolating serenity of character; a devotion without humour or shading; gentleness without weakness; energy without violence. The story of my love resembles an interminable journey over a clean polished surface like a mirror, a dizzyingly monotonous one, which seemed to reflect my every feeling and gesture with the ironic exactness of my own conscious will, so that I dared not allow myself an unreasonable gesture or feeling without immediately feeling the silent reproach of my inseparable ghost. Her love seemed to me more like that of some guardian. How many foolish things she stopped me from doing, which I regret not having enacted! How many debts I paid, despite myself! It robbed me of all the benefits that I could have derived from my personal wildness. Her cold and impenetrable rule stifled all my whims. To make matters worse, she suppressed all acknowledgement of the fact, once the danger had passed. How many times have I refrained from leaping at her throat, shouting: "Betray some imperfection, you wretch! So, I can love you without unease or anger!" For several years, I admired her, my heart full of hatred. Yet, it was not I that died!

– 'Ah!' said the others, 'So she is dead?'

– 'Yes! Things could not continue so. Love had become an overwhelming nightmare. Conquer or die, as the saying goes, such were the alternatives fate offered me! One evening, in a wood... at the edge of a pond... after a melancholy walk, during which her eyes reflected the sweetness of the sky, and my nerves were infernally tense...'

– 'What!'

– 'How!'

– 'What are you saying?'

– 'It was inevitable. I have too great a sense of justice to beat, insult or dismiss an irreproachable servant. But it was necessary to reconcile my sense of justice with the horror that such a being inspired in me; and to rid myself of her, yet with no lack of respect. What would you have had me do with her, *since she was perfect?*'

His three companions gazed at him with a vague and slightly dazed look, as if pretending not to understand, while implicitly admitting that they would not have felt themselves, on their part, capable of such a rigorous action, though one sufficiently justified elsewhere.

Fresh bottles were now brought, so as to kill Time which is so enduring, and speed on life which flows so slowly.

43. The Gallant Marksman (*Le Galant Tireur*)

As the vehicle passed through the woods, he ordered a halt, in the vicinity of a shoot, saying that it would be nice to take a few shots in order to *kill* time. Is not killing that monster, the most common and legitimate occupation of us all? — And he gallantly offered his hand to his dear, delightful, yet execrable wife, that mysterious woman to whom he owes so much pleasure, so much pain, and perhaps also a large part of his genius.

Several bullets fell far from the designated goal; one of them even vanished into the clouds; and as the charming creature laughed wildly, making fun of her husband's clumsiness, he turned towards her, brusquely, and said: 'Observe that target over there, on the right, in the form of a woman, with her nose in the air, and a haughty look. Well! Dear angel, *I shall imagine that's you.*' And, closing his eyes, he released the trigger. The target was neatly decapitated.

Then bowing towards his dear, delightful, execrable wife, his inescapable and pitiless Muse, and kissing her hand, most respectfully, he added: 'Oh! My dear angel, how deeply I thank you for my exercise of skill!'

44. The Soup and the Clouds (*La Soupe et Les Nuages*)

My dearly-beloved little lunatic brought my dinner, as through the open dining-room window I contemplated the restless shapes that God creates from vapour, the wondrous forms of the impalpable. And I said to myself, amid my contemplation: 'All this phantasmagoria is well-nigh as lovely as the eyes of my beautiful beloved, my monstrous little lunatic with green eyes.'

All of a sudden, I received a violent blow on the back, and heard a husky yet charming voice, a hysterical voice as if hoarse with brandy, the

voice of my dear little love, saying: ‘— Will you get on and eat your soup, you damned fool of a cloud-merchant?’

45. The Shooting-Gallery and the Cemetery (*Le Tire et le Cimetière*)

‘*Cemetery View Café*’ – ‘A singular name,’ said our passer-by to himself – ‘but designed to make one thirsty. Doubtless, the owner appreciates Horace and the poetic followers of Epicurus. Perhaps he even knows of the profound refinement of the ancient Egyptians, for whom there was no true feast without the presence of a skeleton, or some emblem of the brevity of life.’

And he entered, drank a glass of beer in sight of the graves, and smoked a cigar slowly. Then the fancy took him to descend to this cemetery, whose grass was so green and inviting, and where such bright sunlight reigned.

For, in truth, the light and heat raged there, and it seemed as if the sun wallowed drunkenly at full length on a carpet of magnificent flowers swollen to destruction. An immense rustle of life filled the air, — the life of the infinitely small, — eclipsed at regular intervals by the crackle of shots from a nearby shooting gallery, which burst like an explosion of champagne corks with a noise akin to the buzzing of a muted symphony.

Then, beneath the sun which heated his brain, and amidst the atmosphere of Death’s ardent perfumes, he heard a voice whispering from the tomb on which he sat. And the voice said: ‘Cursed be your rifles and targets, you turbulent living people, who care so little for the deceased and their divine repose! Cursed be your ambitions, cursed your calculations, impatient mortals, who come to practice the art of killing beside the sanctuary of Death! If you knew how easy a prize it is to win, how easy a goal it is to achieve, and how all is nothingness, except for Death, you would not weary yourselves so, toiling at life, and would disturb the sleep less often of those who have long since reached the Goal, the one true goal of detestable life!’

46. The Lost Halo (*Perte d’Auréole*)

‘What! Are you here, my dear fellow? You, in this wretched place! You, the drinker of every quintessence! You, the eater of ambrosia! In truth, it comes as a great surprise.’

— ‘My dear friend, you know my terror of horses and carriages. Just now, as I was crossing the boulevard, in great haste, and dancing over the mud, amidst that chaotic flow where death comes upon you from all sides at once, my halo slipped from my head, due to a sudden movement, and fell to the tarmac’s mire. I lacked the courage to gather it up. It felt less unpleasant to lose my insignia than have all my bones broken. Also, I said to myself, something good will come of what’s ill. I can walk around incognito now, do wicked deeds, and indulge in villainy, like mere mortals. And here I am, in a like form to you, as you see!’

— ‘You should at least have that halo put on show, or reclaim it from the police.’

— ‘In faith! No. I feel fine here. You alone recognised me. Besides, being dignified bores me. And then, I imagine with joy that some wretched poet will gather it up and wear it, with impudence. What joy to bring happiness! And above all a happiness that will make me smile! Think of X, or Z! Oh! How droll it would be!’

47. Miss Scalpel (*Mademoiselle Bistouri*)

As I arrived at the extremity of the suburb, below a gas-light, I felt an arm slip gently beneath mine, and I heard a voice whisper in my ear: ‘Are you a doctor, sir?’

I found the voice that of a tall, robust wide-eyed girl, without make-up, her hair and the ribbons of her bonnet flowing in the wind.

— ‘No, I’m not. Let me pass.’ — ‘Oh! You’re a doctor, that’s plain to see. Come to my place. You’ll be pleased with me, come!’ — ‘I’ll come see you, sometime, for sure, but I’m no doctor, for goodness’ sake!’ — ‘Ha! Ha!!’ — said she, still hanging on my arm, laughing aloud. — ‘Doctor, you’re a joker, I’ve known several like that. Come on!’

I have a passionate love of mysteries, since I always hope to unravel them. So, I let myself be carried away by my companion, or rather by the unexpected enigma.

I omit the description of her hovel; it can be found in several well-known French poets of times past, except for a detail not noticed by Mathurin Régnier, two or three portraits of famous medical men adorned the walls.

How pampered I was, there! A large fire, mulled wine, cigars; and while offering me these good things and lighting a cigar herself, the comical

creature said to me: ‘Make yourself at home, my friend, make yourself comfortable. It will remind you of the hospital and the good times of your youth. Oh dear! where did you get those white hairs? You weren’t like this, not long ago, when you were an intern under L... I remember; it was you that assisted him in serious cases. There, was a man who loved to cut, snip, and trim! It was you that handed him the instruments, the thread, the sponge. — And when the operation was done, he would say, proudly, looking at his watch: “Five minutes, gentlemen!” — Oh! I go everywhere. I know those gentlemen well.’

A few moments later, speaking more intimately, she resumed her antiphon, and said to me: ‘You are a doctor, aren’t you, my cat?’

This unintelligible refrain made me jump to my feet. ‘No! I shouted furiously.’

— ‘A surgeon, then?’

— ‘No! No! Unless it’s to cut off your head! S... s... c... de s... m...! (*Sacre saint ciborium de saint madame!*)

— ‘Wait,’ she continued, ‘you’ll see.’

And from a cupboard she took a sheaf of papers, which was none other than a collection of portraits, lithographed by Nicolas Maurin, of the famous surgeons and doctors of the day, which could be seen displayed for many years on the Quai Voltaire.

— ‘Look here! Do you recognize this one?’

— ‘Yes! That’s X. His name is below by the way; but I know him personally.’

— ‘I know that! Look! Here’s Z. who said in his lecture, speaking of X: “That monster who wears the blackness of his soul on his face!” All because the latter did not agree with him on some matter! How we laughed about that at the College, back in the day! You remember? — Ah, here’s K. who denounced the rebels he was treating at his hospital to the government. It was at the time of the riots. How can it be that such a handsome man has so little heart? — Now, here is W. a famous English doctor; I caught him during his trip to Paris. He looks like a young lady, doesn’t he?’

As I touched a package, also placed on the table: ‘Wait a moment,’ she said; — ‘these are the interns, those were the doctors.’

And she fanned out a mass of photographic images, representing much younger faces.

— ‘When we meet again, you’ll give me your portrait, won’t you, darling?’

— ‘But’, I said, I too pursuing, in turn, my own *idée fixe*, — why do you think I’m a doctor?’

— ‘Because you’re so kind and good to us women!’

— ‘A singular logic!’ I said to myself.

— ‘Oh! I am hardly ever wrong; I’ve known quite a few. I love these gentlemen so much that, though I’m not ill, I sometimes visit them, just to see them. There are some who say to me, coldly: “You’re not sick at all!” But there are others who understand me, because I make faces at them.

— ‘And when they don’t understand you...?’

— ‘By my Lady! Since I’ve troubled them *unnecessarily*, I leave ten francs on the mantelpiece. — They are so good and sweet, these gentlemen! — I discovered a little intern at La Pitié, who is as pretty as an angel, and who is so polite! And he has to work, the poor boy! His fellow students told me that has no money, because his parents are poor people who can’t send him a sou. That gave me confidence. After all, I am beautiful enough, though not so young. I told him: “Come see me, come see me often. And don’t be shy with me; I don’t need your money.” But you understand that I made him realise it in a multitude of ways; I didn’t put it crudely; I was so afraid of humiliating the dear child! — Well then! Would you believe I have an irresistible longing I don’t dare tell him about? — I’d like him, when he comes to see me, to come with instruments, and his apron even if it’s stained with a little blood!’

She said this with a most candid air, as a sensitive man might say to an actress he likes: ‘I’d like to see you dressed in the costume you wore in that famous role you created.’

Persisting, I continued: ‘Can you remember the time and the occasion when this most singular passion was born in you?’

I made myself understood with difficulty; at last, I succeeded. But she answered me then with a very sad look, and, as I remember, even averted her eyes: ‘I don’t know... I don’t recall.’

What oddities can you not find in a great city, if you know where to look? Life swarms with innocent monsters. — My Lord, my God! You, the Creator, you, the Master; you who made Liberty and the Law; you, the sovereign who allows things to happen, you, the judge who pardons; you who are full of motives and causes, and who perhaps have endowed my mind

with a taste for horror so as to redeem my heart, like healing delivered with the tip of a blade; Lord have mercy, take pity on the mad. O Creator! Can monsters exist in the eyes of One who alone knows why they exist, how they were made so, yet might not have come to be made so?

48. Anywhere out of the World (*N'importe où hors de Monde*)

This life is a hospital where every patient is seized with a longing to change beds. One would like to suffer in front of the stove, another thinks they'd improve next to the window.

It forever seems to me I'll be happy wherever I'm not, and the question of moving my dwelling-place one that I endlessly discuss with my soul.

'Tell me, my soul, my poor frozen soul, what do you think of departing for Lisbon? It must be warm there; you'd perk up in the heat like a lizard. That city is by the shore; it's said to be built of marble, and the people are said to have such a hatred of vegetation they root out all the trees. There, is a landscape to suit your taste; a landscape of light and minerals, and water to reflect them!'

My soul fails to respond.

'Since you love rest so much, as well as the spectacle of movement, would you like to live in Holland, that blissful land? Perhaps you'd enjoy that country whose portrayal you've often admired in galleries. What think you of Rotterdam, you who love forests of masts, ships moored at the feet of houses?'

My soul remains silent.

'Perhaps Batavia would seem more smiling? Moreover, there we might find the spirit of Europe wedded to tropical beauty.'

Not a word. — Is my soul dead?

'Have you reached the point of numbness where you only delight in pain? If so, let's flee to some country that's an analogue for Death. — I'll set it in hand, poor soul! We'll pack our bags for Tornio. Let's go further still, to the far end of the Baltic; further yet from life, if that's possible; let's install ourselves at the pole. There the sun only strikes the earth obliquely, and the slow alternations of day and night suppress variety and add to monotony, that portion of nothingness. There, we'll be able to take long baths of

darkness, while, to divert us, the Northern Lights will send us from time to time their roseate rays, like reflections of the fireworks of Hell!

At last, my soul bursts forth, and cries to me, in its wisdom: ‘Anywhere! Anywhere! As long as it’s out of this world!’

49. Let’s Thump the Poor (*Assommons les Pauvres*)

For two weeks I had confined myself to my room, and surrounded myself with a heap of books fashionable at the time (some sixteen or seventeen years ago); I speak of books in which the art of making people wise, content, and rich in a day is discussed. I had therefore digested – swallowed, I mean, – all the lucubrations of all those entrepreneurs of public happiness – of those who advise the poor to become slaves, and equally those who persuade them they are all dethroned kings. — It will not surprise you then, that I was in a state of mind bordering on vertigo or stupidity.

It seemed to me, though, that I felt, imprisoned in the depths of my intellect, the obscure germ of an idea superior to all those old wives’ formulae, the dictionary of which I had recently perused. But it was merely the idea of an idea, something infinitely vague.

And I left the house possessed of a great thirst. Because a passionate taste for bad literature generates a proportional need for the great outdoors and refreshment.

As I was about to enter a place of entertainment, a beggar held his hat out to me, with one of those unforgettable looks which would topple thrones if mind could move matter, and if the eye of a healer of vines could make the grapes ripen by means of magnetism.

At that same moment, I heard a voice whisper in my ear, a voice I knew well; it was that of the beneficent Angel, or Demon, who accompanies me everywhere. Since Socrates had his beneficent Demon, why should I not have a corresponding Angel, and why should I not have the honour, like Socrates, of obtaining a certificate of madness, in my case signed by that subtle doctor, Louis Lélut and that knowledgeable psychiatrist Jules Baillarger?

A difference exists between Socrates’ Demon and mine, that his only manifested itself in order to defend, warn, and prevent, while mine deigns to advise, suggest, and persuade. Poor Socrates only had one Demon, of denial; mine is a mighty affirmer, a Demon of action and combat.

Its voice now whispered: ‘He alone is the equal of another, who proves it, and he alone is worthy of liberty, who knows how to conquer her.’

At once, I leapt at my beggar. With a single blow, I closed up one of his eyes, which swelled, in an instant, till it was large as a ball. I broke one of my nails in breaking two of his teeth, and, as I felt my strength insufficient to knock the old man out swiftly, having been born of a delicate constitution, and possessing little experience of boxing, I grabbed him by the collar of his coat with one hand, grasped him by the throat with the other, and began to knock his head vigorously against the wall. I must confess I had previously inspected my surroundings with a glance, and had verified that, in this deserted suburb, I would be, for a good length of time, beyond the reach of the law.

Having, with a kick launched at his back forceful enough to break his shoulder blades, knocked down this feeble sixty-year-old, I grabbed a large branch of a tree that lay on the ground, and beat him, with the stubborn energy of a cook seeking to tenderise a steak.

Suddenly, — O miracle! O delight of the philosopher who verifies the excellence of his theory! — I saw this ancient carcass turn and straighten itself, with an energy I would never have suspected in so singularly broken a mechanism, and, with a look of hatred that seemed to me to *augur well*, the decrepit old scoundrel hurled himself at me, punched me in the eyes, knocked out four of my teeth, and with that same tree branch of mine gave me a good pasting. — By my energetic treatment, I had thus restored to him both life and pride.

I made him understand, by giving a strong signal or two, that I considered our discussion to be at an end, and rising with the satisfaction of a Stoic beneath the Stoa, I said to him: ‘Sir, *you are my equal!* please do me the honor of sharing my purse; and remember, if you are a true philanthropist, that you must inflict on all your colleagues, when they seek alms of you, the theory that I had the *pain* of inflicting on your back.’

He swore to me that he had grasped my theory, and would obey my advice.

50. The Good Dogs (*Les Bons Chiens*) – To M. Joseph Stevens

I have never been ashamed, even before the young writers of this century, of my admiration for the Comte de Buffon; but today it is not the soul of that pompous painter of nature that I will call to my aid. No.

I would rather address, and far more willingly, Lawrence Sterne, and say to him: ‘Descend from the sky, or rise up from the Elysian fields, to inspire a song in me, in favour of good dogs, poor dogs, a song worthy of you, you sentimental and incomparable jester! Return, astride that famous donkey which always accompanies you, in the memory of posterity; and above all ensure the donkey fails not to bear, delicately suspended between its lips, that immortal macaroon!’

Behind me, muse of Academe! I care not for the old prude. I invoke the common muse, the city-dweller, the living one, to help me sing of the good dog, the poor dog, the muddy dog, the one that all dismiss as plague-ridden, louse-ridden, except he who is its companion, and the poet who looks on it with a fraternal eye.

Fie upon the dandified dog, the fat quadruped, the Little Dane, the King Charles, pug or spaniel, so delighted with himself that he rushes indiscreetly at the legs or up onto the knees of a visitor, as if he were sure of pleasing, as turbulent as a child, stupid as a courtesan, and sometimes as surly and insolent as a servant! Above all, beware of these four-legged serpents, shivering and idle, that we call greyhounds, and which have too feeble a sense of smell in their pointed snouts to follow the trail of a friend, nor enough intelligence in their flattened heads to play at dominoes!

To the doghouse, with all those wearisome parasites!

Let them return to their silk-lined, padded niches! I sing of the muddy dog, the poor dog, the homeless dog, the stray dog, the acrobatic dog, the dog whose instinct, like that of the poor, the bohemian and the itinerant actor, is spurred on wondrously by necessity, so good a mother, so true a patroness of intelligence!

I sing of the tragic dogs, whether those who wander, solitary, in the winding ravines of immense cities, or those who say to the abandoned man, with flickering and spiritual eyes: ‘Take me with you, and from our two miseries we will perhaps achieve some kind of happiness!’

‘Where are the dogs going?’ Nestor Roqueplan, the journalist, once asked, in an immortal literary article which he has doubtless forgotten, and which only I, and Sainte-Beuve perhaps, still remember today.

‘Where are the dogs going?’ you ask, you inattentive fellows? They are going about their business. A business meeting, a lovers’ rendezvous. Through the mist, through the snow, through the excrement, in a biting heatwave, beneath the falling rain, they come, they go, they trot, they pass beneath vehicles, spurred on by fleas, passion, need or duty. Like us, they rose early in the morning, and go seeking a living or pursuing their pleasures.

There are some who sleep in some ruin in the suburbs and who come, every day, at a fixed time, to beg at the door of a kitchen in the Palais-Royal; others who come running, in packs, from more than five leagues away, to share the meal prepared for them through the charity of certain sixty-year-old virgins whose unaffianced hearts have given themselves to animals, because imbecile men no longer want them.

Others, like dark-skinned Africans, maddened by love, leave their district on certain days to come to the city, to frolic for an hour or so with some lovely female dog, a little neglected in her grooming, but proud and grateful.

And they are all very punctual, without notebooks, or aide-memoires, or portfolios.

Do you know idle Belgium, and have admired, as I have, all those vigorous dogs harnessed to the butchers’, milkmaids’ or bakers’ carts, and who testify, by their triumphant barking, to the proud pleasure they derive from competing with the horses?

Here are two that belong to an even more civilised order! Allow me to introduce you to the dwelling of the absent acrobat. A bed, made of painted wood, without curtains, blankets trailing, and soiled by bedbugs, two straw chairs, a cast iron stove, one or two broken musical instruments. Oh! The sad furnishings! But observe, if you please, these two intelligent characters, dressed in clothes both worn and sumptuous, the hair on their head styled like that of troubadours or soldiers, gazing, with the close-attention of sorcerers, at the nameless concoction simmering on the lighted stove, in the centre of which stands a long spoon, planted like one of those masts on high that proclaim the building complete.

Is it not fair that such zealous actors should set forth having filled their stomachs with a solid strengthening soup? And will you not forgive a

little sensuality in poor devils who have to face the indifference of the public all day long, and the injustices of a director who takes the best part and eats more soup than four actors alone?

How many times have I smiling and moved, contemplated, all those four-legged philosophers, complacent, submissive or devoted slaves, whom the republican dictionary could just as easily term unofficial, if the republic, too busy with the happiness of men, had time to protect the honour of dogs!

And how many times I have thought that, perhaps, there is somewhere (after all, who knows?) a special paradise for the good dogs, the poor dogs, the muddy and desolate dogs. Swedenborg clearly states that there is one for the Turks and one for the Dutch!

The shepherds of Virgil and Theocritus expected, as the price for their alternating stretches of song, a good cheese, a flute from the finest maker, or a goat with swollen udders. The poet who sang of such poor dogs received as a reward a beautiful waistcoat, of a colour both rich and faded, which made men think of autumn suns, the beauty of ripe women, and Indian summers.

None of those who were present in the tavern on the Rue Villa-Hermosa (*Horton's Prince of Wales tavern, Brussels*) will forget with what petulance the painter stripped himself of that waistcoat in favour of the poet, so profoundly had he come to understand that it was good and honest to sing of the poor dogs.

Thus, a superb Italian tyrant, in the good old days, would offer the divine Pietro Aretino either a dagger enriched with precious stones, or a court-cloak, in exchange for a precious sonnet or an intriguing satirical poem. And thus, every time the poet dons the painter's waistcoat he is forced to think of good dogs, philosophic dogs, Indian summers and the beauty of over-ripe women.



'After the Hunt' - Gustave Courbet (French, 1819-1877)
Artvee

Epilogue

With quiet heart, I climbed the hill,
From which one sees, the city, complete,
Hospitals, brothels, purgatory, hell,

Prison, where every sin flowers, at our feet.
You know well, Satan, patron of my distress,
I did not trudge up there to vainly weep,

But like an old man with an old mistress,
Longed to intoxicate myself with infernal delight
In the vast procuress, who renders things fresh.

Whether you still sleep in the morning light,
Heavy, dark, rheumatic, or whether your hands
Flutter, in your pure, gold-edged veils of night,

I love you, infamous capital! Courtesans
And pimps, so often you offer pleasures
That the vulgar mob will never understand.

The end of Baudelaire's 'Le Spleen de Paris'